This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

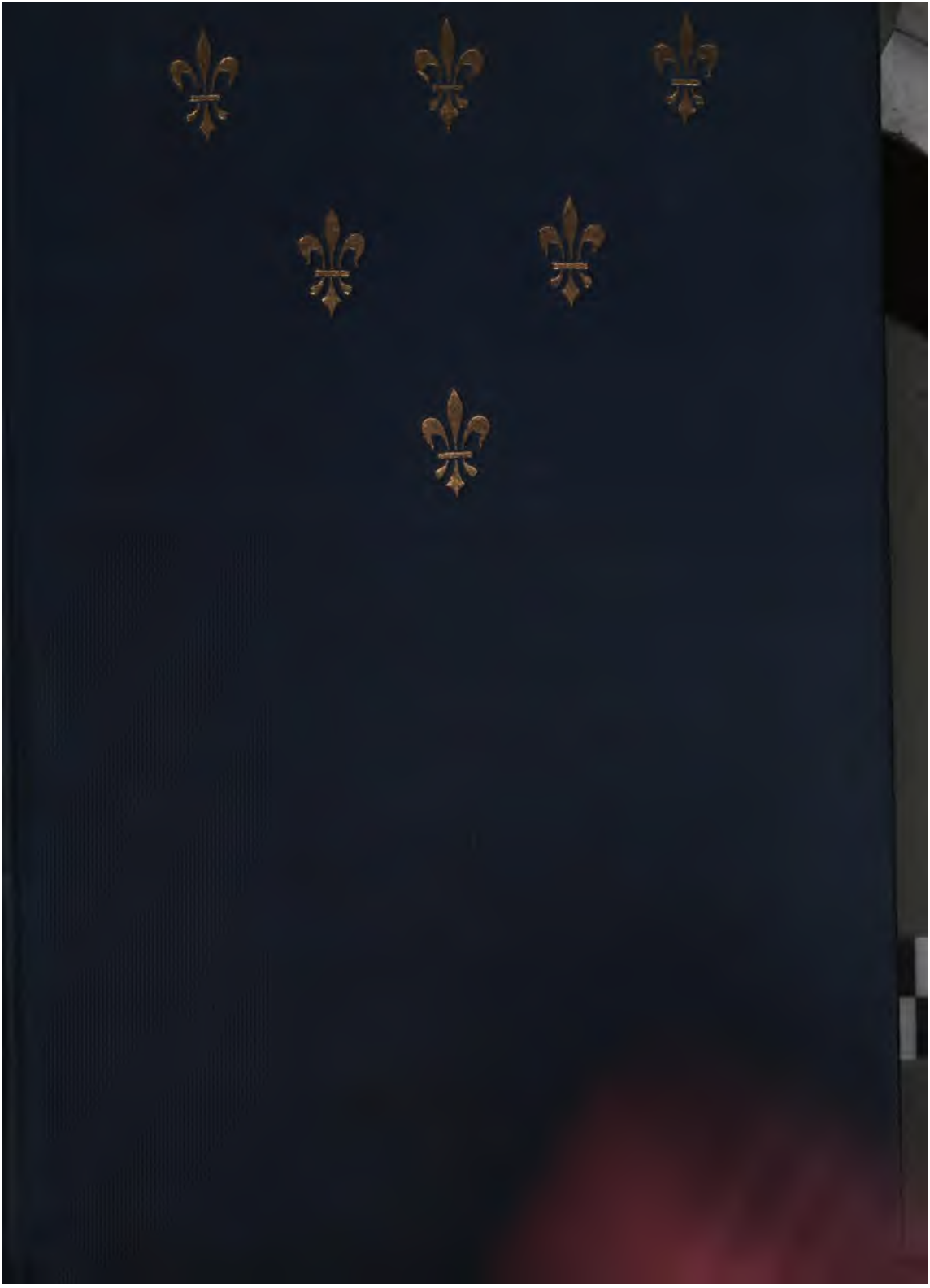
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



WOMAN IN FRANCE

DURING THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

1 VOL

WOMAN IN FRANCE

DURING THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Madame de Pompadour

AS LA BELLE JARDINIERE

WOMAN IN FRANCE

DURING THE

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY JULIA KAVANAGH

AUTHOR OF 'MADELAINE: A TALE OF AUVERGNE'

ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WITH PORTRAITS

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK
27 W. TWENTY-THIRD STREET

LONDON
24 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND

1893

DC 36.2
K25
v.1

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

PERIOD THE FIRST—THE REGENCY.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

PAGE

Preliminary Remarks—State of French Society at the close of Louis XIV.'s Reign, ... 3

CHAPTER I.

The Regent—His Court and his Family, ... 23

CHAPTER II.

Madame du Maine—The Society of Sceaux—The Cellamare Conspiracy, ... 39

CHAPTER III.

The Countess of Verrue—Madame de Lambert—State of French Society during the Regency and the Period immediately following it—The Nun Tencin—Madame de Prie, ... 60

CHAPTER IV.

Madame de Ferriol—Mademoiselle Aïssé, ... 74

PERIOD THE SECOND—REIGN OF LOUIS XV.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

Retrospective View of the Regency—The First Bureaux d'Esprit—Madame de la Popelinière—Madame de Tencin, 89

CHAPTER II.

The Court—Louis XV.—His Mistresses—Madame de Mailly—Madame de Vintimille—Madame de Chateauroux, . 102

CHAPTER III.

Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet, ... 119

CHAPTER IV.

The Philosophers—Literary Societies—Madame d'Epinay—Rousseau, ... 141

CHAPTER V.

General Aspect of Society—Power of Woman—Madame du Deffand, ... 160

CHAPTER VI.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, ... 177

CHAPTER VII.

Madame Geoffrin—Influence of the Bureaux d'Esprit, . 193

CHAPTER VIII.

Madame de Pompadour—Her Political Power and General Influence—Madame du Marchais and the Economists—Madame du Barry—Death of Louis XV., . . . 207

AUTHORS CONSULTED.

D'Abrantès, Madame
Aïssé, Mademoiselle
Albert, Mademoiselle
Alison
Alletz
D'Angoulême, Duchesse
Argenson
Barante
Barrère
Beauchamps
Beaumarchais
Berryer
Bourmiseaux
Brougham
Burton
Campan, Madame
Capefigue
Carlyle
Chauteaubriand
Chateauroux, Madame de
Clairon, Mademoiselle
Cléry
Colet, Madame
Custine
Dangeau
Deladine
Desmoulins
Desodoards
Dessales-Régis
Dubois
Deffand, Madame du
Dulaure
Dumont
Dumouriez
D'Epinay, Madame
Franklin
Garat
Genlis, Madame de
Georgel
Gibbon
Gozlan
Grimm
Guadet
Guillon
Hausset, Madame du
Histoire de la Révolution
Lacretelle
Lamartine
Lambert, Madame de
Langon
Lespinasse, Mademoiselle de
Lévis
Lonchamps
Louvet
Maine, Madame du
Marivaux

Marmontel
Meilhan
Mémoires sur Mirabeau
Mercier
Michaud
Mignet
Mirabeau: A Life-History
Montgaillard
Musset
Necker, Madame
Necker de Saussure, Madame
Prévost
Proussinale
Prudhomme
Riouffe
Rochejaquelein, Madame de la
Rousseau
Saint-Simon
Saint-Beuve
Schlosser
Ségur
Ségur, De
Smythe
Soulavie
Souvestre
Souvenirs, de R. D. G.
Staal, Madame de
Staël, Madame de
Tencin, Madame de
Thibeaudeau
Thiers
Toulongeon
Villemain
Voltaire
Walpole
Weber
Williams, Helen-Maria

PORTRAITS IN VOL. I.

	PAGE
MADAME DE POMPADOUR, . . (*To face Title*)	
DUCHESSE DU MAINE, ...	39
MADAME DE TENCIN, ...	66
MADAME DU CHATELET, ...	122
MADAME DU BARRY, ...	225

WOMAN IN FRANCE

DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS —STATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY AT THE CLOSE OF LOUIS THE FOURTEENTH'S REIGN.

In times still recent, in a nation celebrated for its power and greatness, and in an age which gave to thought a vast and magnificent, even though perilous, development, a series of most remarkable women exercised a power so extensive, and yet so complete, as to be unparalleled in the history of their sex.

They ruled society, as women of the world; the empire of letters, as patronesses of the fine arts; the state, as favourites and advisers of kings. They gave the tone to feeling, philosophy, and thought. Their caprice made wars, and signed treaties of peace. They hastened the fall of a Monarchy, and the outbreak of the greatest Revolution of modern times. They could attempt to check or direct that Revolution in its rapid and fearful course; they shared to the fullest extent its errors, its crimes, and its heroic virtues. They suffered from its proscriptions like men, because like men they had striven; and when their failing power seemed at its last ebb, it was still a woman who overthrew Robespierre, a woman who raised a solitary voice against the despotism of Napoleon.

This power was not always pure or good: it was often

corrupt in its source, evil and fatal in its results; but it was power. Though the historians of the period have never fully or willingly acknowledged its existence, their silence cannot efface that which has been; and without that rule of woman, so reluctantly recognised, many of their pages of statesman's policy, court intrigue, civil strife, or foreign war, need never have been written. To this remarkable feature of modern history, to the analysis of the power of Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century, the present work is devoted.

We shall trace the progress of direct female influence, from the aged and severe Madame de Maintenon deserting the deathbed of Louis XIV. to the lovely and hapless Marie Antoinette ascending the scaffold of the Revolution. We shall mark Woman's social rule extending from princesses and favourites, like Madame du Maine and Madame de Pompadour, to literary and noble ladies like the nun Tencin, Madame du Chatelet, the mistress of Voltaire, and Madame du Deffand, the friend of Walpole. From these, again, we shall see it descending to the heroines of the Bourgeoisie and the Revolution, Madame Roland and Madame Tallien.

It was chiefly in the eighteenth century that women exercised, to its fullest extent, the great and remarkable influence they always possessed in France. They were allowed no political rights, but society gave them the power denied by law. That power was paramount in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It had far more reality and truth than the idolatrous homage they received during the Middle Ages. Woman was then a being to be idealised and illustrated by fervent strains and chivalrous deeds; but neither Paladin nor Troubadour submitted in reality to her abstract sway. Woman has seldom less true power than when the admiration and love of man are granted merely to her beauty and defenceless state. Such as it was, this influence tended, however, to modify the national character; to which it imparted that chivalrous gallantry and elegance, not unmixed with frivolousness, by which it was long distinguished.

The progress of civilisation, which raised the moral and

intellectual standard of woman, naturally extended her power. Towards the close of the Middle Ages, and the beginning of a new era, we find her everywhere entering actively into the political and religious struggles which marked the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This influence was increased in France by the three Queens-Regent, Catherine of Medici, Mary, her niece, and Anne of Austria. Woman now ostensibly took the lead in every intrigue. The wars of the Fronde, with Anne of Austria on one side, and on the other the haughty Mademoiselle de Montpensier, or the beautiful Duchess of Longueville, who made tools of Condé and Turenne, effectually distracted the kingdom during the minority of Louis XIV. When peace had succeeded to those troubled times, the celebrated soirées of the Hôtel Rambouillet, presided over by the fair Julie d'Angennes, Mademoiselle de Scudéri, Madame de Sévigné, and Madame de Lafayette, gave a new impulse to the literature of the day. Later still, the witty and accomplished, though profligate, Madame de Montespan, and her insinuating successor, Madame de Maintenon, can almost be said to have governed France under the name of the Grand Monarque.

This power was the more important, that, for the greatest portion of his life, Louis XIV. completely ruled French society. His tastes for magnificence and war were the tastes of the nation. They gave to his government new power and new strength; so that he could exclaim, with equal pride and truth, "L'état c'est moi." This despotic sway prepared, by its unity, the future greatness of France; but it extinguished patriotism, by rendering the country subordinate to the sovereign's personal honour and glory. Each change of the monarch's mood altered the aspect of his court; and, if he governed Versailles, Versailles governed France. It was, therefore, only through Louis himself that women could rule. The influence of his mistresses was personal, like their lover's government. Through him, these highly-born and accomplished, though not very virtuous ladies, impressed their own character and spirit on the times in which they lived. In order to please

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the chivalrous amusements of the Middle Ages were resumed at court; satire and intrigue prospered under Madame de Montespan; asceticism and rigid devotion marked the sway of Madame de Maintenon.

The opening of the eighteenth century, which gave more force and freedom to woman's power, also beheld the close of Louis XIV.'s reign. That long and imperious sway, which had united all the magnificence and glories of art to the most absolute despotism, was passing away in sadness and austerity. The couriers, who formerly brought tidings of victory won, now told of heavy reverses and lost battles. The nation, drained of its resources to satisfy one man's ambition and pride, was evidently on the brink of bankruptcy. The gay and royal revels of the court had vanished, before vigils, fasts, and penitential gloom. More than monastic silence and seclusion shrouded the splendours of Versailles. The king no longer listened to the stately tragedies of Racine, or to the gay comedies of Molière, surrounded by a host of beautiful women and courtly nobles. Apart, in a gloomy and retired chamber, he sat, between his confessor and the withered Madame de Maintenon, a feeble, querulous, but still despotic, old man, who vainly sought to impart his own melancholy asceticism to France.

The court and nation rebelled against the power to which they had submitted so long. Louis XIV. saw, with indignation and dismay, that his influence was no longer acknowledged; that, though he had grown penitent and devout, the world still remained unconverted, and chose to indulge in those follies of youth over which he now mourned in his old age. Deep homage surrounded him still: but where was the reality of that homage? An irrepressible longing for a new and younger reign was abroad. This spirit of innovation was odious to the old monarch; not only because it anticipated his death, but, still more, because it threatened to destroy the labours of his whole existence. He knew that the princes of the blood only waited his decease in order to assert their long-restrained freedom. His grandson, the Duke of Burgundy,

the heir of his absolute power—a grave, religious prince, pupil of Fénélon—spoke of the rights of the people, and of the duties of monarchs. The duchess, his wife, a gay and graceful princess, hinted that the pleasures of the new court would compensate for the gloom of the old one. The young Duke of Orleans, the future Regent of France, condemned to inactivity through the jealousy of his uncle, avenged himself by braving his power. Gathering around him a circle of licentious nobles, he carried on with them the grossest orgies, in which the names of the monarch and Madame de Maintenon were uttered with sarcasm and scorn. The Prince and Princess of Conti affected to treat with familiar freedom the authors whom their independence of thought and speech rendered obnoxious to the king. Defying the prejudice against authorship, the princess took the character of a literary woman.* Her sister, Madame du Maine, wife of the sovereign's eldest legitimised son, shunned the gloomy court of her father-in-law. She made her delightful residence at Sceaux the resort of the wits of the day. A constant interchange of epigrams, madrigals, and poetical epistles, was carried on between the guests and their princely hostess, who daily acted the comedies of Molière and the tragedies of Racine with Baron the actor; thus violating the strict etiquette introduced by Louis XIV. as the safeguard of royalty.

The monarch vainly sought to check this spirit of weariness and ennui at his protracted reign. It pervaded even his own family circle. The eldest Princess of Conti, his daughter by Mademoiselle de la Vallière, ridiculed him and Madame de Maintenon in her private letters. Her sister, Mademoiselle de Nantes, Duchess of Bourbon, and celebrated, like her mother, Madame de Montespan, for her beauty and satirical wit, lamented, in petulant effusions, the fate of youth and beauty compelled to reside among the old pedants of an antiquated court. With more candour than charity she exclaimed:—

* She translated into French Pope's "Rape of the Lock."

"Ah! qu'une vieille cour est hideuse!
On n'y parle jamais ni d'amour ni d'amans;
Qu'une princesse est malheureuse
D'y passer ses plus jeunes ans!
Que c'est une chose ennuyeuse
De ne voir que de vieux pédants!"

Such epigrams and *noëls* then enjoyed extreme popularity. Both courtiers and people felt avenged when they could laugh at the common oppressor. The police watched and punished in vain. The thought of a nation will ever assert its freedom. Supple as they were by nature, the courtiers could not always disguise their real feelings. The witty Madame de Caylus, niece of Madame de Maintenon, being exiled from Versailles for having ridiculed the devout party, frankly exclaimed, on receiving the order of her banishment, "that the ennui felt at court rendered it the real place of exile." Madame de Maintenon herself was overpowered with the dulness of this vast prison-house. "Ah!" said she to a friend who seemed to envy her proud destiny, "if you knew what it is to have to amuse a man whom nothing can amuse!"

The faded glory of his reign, the gloom and reverses which darkened its close, the impatience of the new generation, the ill-concealed ennui of his children and friends,—all told Louis XIV., with a significance and eloquence he could not misunderstand, that his sway had lasted too long; that it was time for him to depart. But the old king resisted this charge with all the strength of his despotic will. If he could not create religious feeling, he at least exacted hypocrisy. A royal guard, on duty in the chapel at Versailles, desirous of amusing himself at the expense of the court ladies, one day declared in their presence that his majesty did not intend assisting at the religious service then going to take place. The ladies, wisely concluding that if the king was not to be present their devotion would be very uselessly thrown away, dropped off, one by one. Louis XIV. came as usual, and was amazed to see the chapel empty, until the guard informed him of his mischievous trick. A large party at court did not, however, choose to practise this restraint: the young and profligate

nobles gathered around the Duke of Orleans, and gloried in the opprobrious name of "roués." Two parties were thus in presence: one, consisting chiefly of superannuated libertines, gave itself up to all the austerities of seeming devotion; whilst the other, which counted in its ranks the sons and daughters of these hollow devotees—the youth and flower of the nobility, revelled in the grossest and most open licentiousness.

Louis XIV. vainly sought to restore France to her ancient faith; her lips professed it still, but incredulity was in her heart. The profligacy of the higher clergy, and the narrow-mindedness of the Jansenists—those Puritans of Catholicism—had alike been fatal to religion. Atheism prevailed,—not indeed under the form of that daring philosophy of later times, which left no mystery unscrutinised, and no destructive argument untold,—but as a great and lamentable want of faith; because faith was worn out and exhausted. "Why, people laugh at everything here!" said the young Duchess of Burgundy, when she came to the court of France. The naïve remark expresses admirably the nature of the scepticism of the period. Mere mockery!—no more!

This Epicurean creed was first propagated by the profligate and indolent aristocracy. The stern rule of Richelieu had broken their chivalrous spirit with the ancient feudal power from which it sprang. They left their old ancestral halls for the palaces of kings: from haughty vassals they became servile courtiers. They were despised by the absolute monarch, as dependants on his favour and will; and by the oppressed people, as a class loaded with privileges and wealth, but without power. The sense of self-dignity and honour faded away from them: they gloried in their vices; cheated at cards, and confessed it. Fontenelle wished to prevent the publication of Hamilton's "Memoirs of De Grammont," in order to spare the hero whose dishonesty they exposed. De Grammont, who had received 1500 livres for the manuscript, hastened to remove the impediment. As if to render rank and title more contemptible still, the minister, Pont Chartrain, had made

them both saleable. For two thousand crowns a roturier might become a gentilhomme. Heavy taxes were laid on the letters-patent of nobility; for the vanity of the financiers who wished to become noble, rendered this a profitable branch of revenue. To such an extent was this practice carried, that a large body of men had no other occupation than to provide arms and genealogies for the new nobility. This second-rate aristocracy was, like the old, exempt from taxation. The Celestins, a religious house of Paris, accordingly purchased the office of secretary to the king, which conferred nobility, and freed them from the taille. Thus the people, on whom rested the real burden of supporting the nation, were oppressed by both rank and wealth. The nobles, whilst they hated the plebeian intruders into their order, married their richly-dowered daughters; protesting, however, like Madame de Grignan, "that they were only manuring their barren ancestral lands, in order to render them once more fertile." But the truth was, that the aristocracy felt the power, so long granted to rank and chivalrous honour, now passing over to wealth and practical intelligence. The wealthy bourgeoisie remained for some time unconscious of their own importance; before which even the haughty Louis XIV. was compelled to bow. Samuel Bernard, the rich Jewish traitant, having refused to grant a large loan required by the minister Des Marets, was presented to the king at Marly, and shewn over the palace by the monarch; who paid him such flattering marks of distinction, that the vain and elated financier immediately gave his consent to the required agreement.

Half a century later, all the seductions of the Grand Monarque would have failed in producing such a result; but the financiers still occupied an inferior position in society: they were striving to win their place; they had not won it. With all their extravagance and pride, they lacked the polish and elegance of the aristocrats, through whom they, the men of the people, were connected with the first families of the realm. Their activity and ambition tended to supply these deficiencies. They attained rank and power; whilst the

nobles, too proud to stoop to scientific and literary pursuits, remained in a state of luxurious indolence, which justified the bitter definition of Montesquieu, — "A lord is a man who sees the king, speaks to the minister, has ancestors, debts, and pensions."

But if men were thus inactive and powerless, women were not. The same Montesquieu declared, "that the individual who would attempt to judge of the government by the men at the head of affairs, and not by the women who swayed those men, would fall into the same error as he who judges of a machine by its outward action, and not by its secret springs." Women were indeed already exercising that great power, which attained its full development towards the middle of the century. They eagerly seized on influence, whatever the means of influence might be. They had received from their male relatives a shameless example of profligacy, which they were not slow to follow. When women fall, they fall deeper than men, because the only sense of honour allowed them by society departs, if once the purity of their lives is tainted. The abandoned conduct of ladies of rank threw a great reproach on their order. It created doubts on the legitimacy of the most noble families, and scandalised the people who lived apart in patriarchal austerity. The corrupting tendency of a despotic government had reached the women who lived beneath its sway. The men, deprived of political rights, used their female friends as the means of their ambition. Indirect power is necessarily immoral: when exercised by women, it is still more so. At the times of which we speak, a spirit of ambition and intrigue, not pure in its origin or purely exercised, seemed to have seized on the whole sex. The persevering ambition of the widow of the burlesque poet, Scarron, had made her Queen of France, in all save name. Her friend, Madame Guyon, attempted to found a religious sect, and caused the long quarrel between Bossuet and Fénélon, which ended in the exile of the latter. Whilst apparently wrapt in the gaieties of Sceaux, Madame du Maine plotted and schemed for the aggrandisement of her husband; one of

her chief agents being her clever femme de chambre, Mademoiselle de Launay. Ladies who had nothing better to do, and no surer means of making a fortune, turned their hotels into gambling-houses, from which they derived a large and infamous revenue. Others conscientiously devoted themselves to the education of the young noblesse. The youthful De Fronsac, so well known for his intrigues under the name Richelieu, was early taught, by Madame de Brancas, to write billets-doux which he could never spell, make imaginary assignations, feign love, jealousy, and all the other appearances of the tender passion. Thanks to this early and judicious teaching, his father was compelled to send him to the Bastile in the fifteenth year of his age.

Some women intrigued without any definite object; for the mere pleasure of intriguing, and because their over-active minds needed exertion. Of these was an obscure lady named Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie. Without rank, wealth, or beauty, concealing her consummate tact under an air of naïve simplicity, she yet exercised a great and occult power. She served people whom she had never seen, for whose gratitude she did not care, and who never felt any gratitude for her. She was feared by the ministers, she often upset Madame de Maintenon's most deeply-laid schemes, and, without creating even a suspicion in his mind, she had the art of influencing the decisions of Louis XIV.

Being one day in the salon of Madame de Ventadour, she learned, by accident, that Letellier, the king's Jesuit confessor, was to obtain from the monarch an order to arrest the Cardinal of Noailles, a Jansenist, on the following morning. Determined that this should not be, she immediately proceeded to Versailles, and, being introduced into the presence of the king, according to the privilege he had granted her, observed, with her usual bonhomie, that his majesty looked unwell and annoyed, probably by some new priest's quarrel. She then dropped a few hints on the expediency of letting the Jesuits and Jansenists settle their own dissensions, and of preserving, above all things, a health so invaluable to the kingdom.

The king was so struck with this reasoning, and especially with that portion of it relative to his health, that, when Letellier asked him the next morning for the order to arrest the cardinal, he drily informed him he had altered his mind, and wished to hear no more on the subject. Thus was the coup d'état, so long prepared by Madame de Maintenon and the confessor, wholly overthrown. In relating this anecdote to a friend, several years after the death of Louis XIV., Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie confessed that she only retained her power over the monarch's mind by assuming an appearance of such simplicity, and even stupidity, that he never suspected the measures he adopted to have arisen from her apparently careless suggestions. She acknowledged at the same time, that the mental exertion necessary to maintain this constant dissimulation often left her overpowered with fatigue.

There was nothing likely to purify or exalt the female character in influence so exercised; we accordingly find few of the women, who possessed any power, remarkable for moral excellence. Their intellect, from not being allowed a free scope, was perverted to evil ends. The prejudice against female authorship, in persons of high rank, was still so strong, that the amiable and accomplished Marchioness of Lambert would never allow her productions to be published. It was only by manuscript copies, obtained from her friends, that the booksellers could succeed in printing them; and on one occasion she bought back the whole edition. This prejudice, as Madame de Lambert observed herself, acted injudiciously on the female character. The ridicule which Boileau and Molière had cast on all female writers was more prejudicial still. Many women, who might have spent their time in an agreeable and at least harmless manner, supposing their writings to possess little merit, were thrown back on intrigue for an occupation. The idleness to which noble women were, like all persons of their rank, reduced, added to their degradation and heartlessness. Notwithstanding, however, the general profligacy, the *convenances* were still strictly observed. Any high-

born lady, chiefly known for the irregularity of conduct, could, like Madame de Parabère, the mistress of the Regent, act the part of a heoric and devoted wife. If her husband was attacked with the small-pox, then so fatal, she made her will, bade her relations farewell, and became the patient's nurse; her own life often being the price of this sacrifice to vanity and ostentation: when, like Madame de Parabère, she was so fortunate as to survive the trial, she did not fail, as soon as it was over, to return to her intrigues; whilst the world still rang with praise, which all knew to be as false and hollow as this seeming devotedness.

Besides the individual power of intrigue, there was another power, higher still, far more effectual, and on which women had the tact to seize at once. We allude to the influence literature already conferred.

In consequence of the gloomy tastes of the monarch, of the weakness of the clergy, of the indolent profligacy of the nobles, and of the coarseness of the wealthy bourgeois, the real social power had become transferred to literature; which, in its turn, was considerably modified by the women of the day. During almost the whole of the eighteenth century, France was in a state of political repose. Thinkers were the only active men; their power was necessarily great. When the body is at rest, the mind must work. Those thinkers submitted, however, to the influence of woman, because their activity was purely mental. They were men of theory, who, whilst they ruined the social edifice, left to others the task of active destruction. The spirit of antagonism, which then pervaded every class, was the reason that, though so often persecuted and contemned by their contemporaries, the French writers of the eighteenth century, nevertheless, retained their influence over them to the last. Though it gave birth to so many remarkable productions, the seventeenth century had not granted a similar power to its literature. There was then more of abstract art, and less of active thought, than in the following period. The patronage of Louis XIV. shackled literary freedom. His praises and pensions silenced genius

more effectually than persecution. This conduct was not, however, the result of policy. The great power of the press, as a vehicle for political and philosophical opinions, was still unsuspected in France. The satires of Boileau and the comedies of Molière were directed against the vices of society, not against society itself: "Tartuffe," Molière's boldest effort, was openly sanctioned by the king. The change which the succeeding century wrought in the influence of literature extended to society. Men of every class felt the want of mingling more freely together; the author emerged from his study and appeared in the fashionable world, to which he imparted some of his own gravity of thought, whilst he acquired an ease and polish hitherto foreign to him.

The action of literary men on society was chiefly exercised through the women, in whose select assemblies they were admitted, and who naturally influenced their views, and their mode of expressing them. This is an important fact; for, though less politically great than in the preceding century, France was then acknowledged to be the focus of European intelligence. Her philosophers, her literary and scientific men, interpreted the feelings and opinions of the age; to which their daring scepticism and satirical raillery soon gave the prevailing tone. She no longer owed her preponderance over other nations to the personal character of her monarch; for the hand that swayed her was vacillating and weak: her greatness was not political, but social and intellectual: her power was that of ideas, and it proved more great and extensive than the warlike despotism of Louis XIV. M. Guizot judiciously remarks, in his "History of Civilisation," that "the power which France possesses of imparting her own feelings and ideas to other nations, does not spring from the originality of those ideas, which are often borrowed, but from the sociable and communicative character of the people." To this we may add, that for this characteristic France is chiefly indebted to her women, and their influence in society. This was especially the case in the last century, when their power was so great that Schlosser has not hesitated to compare it to

that exercised by Richelieu and Colbert over their own times. This is almost equivalent to saying that it was unbounded.

Women owed this power to the want of political liberty. This want was not greater than in the preceding century; but the wish for freedom had increased. The salons over which they presided were the only places where what could not have been published, without the prospect of the Bastile, might be spoken with comparative impunity. This is why the influence of woman can so clearly be traced through all the philosophy and literature of the eighteenth century. That graceful brilliancy of style—the light, frivolous mask, which concealed such destructive features—clearly belong to her, and to that conversational power fostered beneath her care, under the name of causerie; so distinctive, in itself, of the times and of the national character.

It was, however, at a much later period that literature acquired this great influence in France. Voltaire was still unknown under Louis XIV.; Fontenelle's cautious scepticism only paved the way for bolder attacks on creeds and doctrines; Lesage merely aimed at the reformation of manners, and, in portraying his contemporaries, he left a lamentable picture of their total want of moral sense. A few literary societies, nevertheless, existed: that of Madame du Maine was brilliant, social, literary, and political. It answered her taste for wit and her ambitious designs.

Old Ninon de l'Enclos, once so celebrated for her beauty and Epicurean philosophy, and still known by her wit, also gathered around her some of the most eminent men of the day, who met to rail, with more decency, however, than was displayed in the abodes of princesses, at what the world still respected outwardly. There might have been seen J. B. Rousseau, the poet; the gay Abbé de Chaulieu; Fontenelle, whose easy philosophy marked the transition between the two centuries; Chateauneuf, the ancient admirer of the once young and beautiful hostess; and a child named Arouet, who grew up in these sceptical and corrupt assemblies, and who afterwards transferred their immoral and irreligious doctrines

to his writings, in the purest and most elegant French ever written since the seventeenth century.

A spirit of discontent and a defiance of authority characterised these coteries. Authors now no longer depended on haughty patrons: they were courted by society itself; and yet their irritable pride was constantly wounded by new slights, reminding them of their former subordinate position. Keenly alive to evils from which they suffered, and to all of evil that they saw, they attacked, without much mercy, whatever they thought worthy of being condemned. Their attacks were in accordance with the spirit of the times. Vague ideas of freedom were already abroad. The English revolution of 1688 produced a deep and lasting impression in France. Many began to wonder why the nation, which was all in a neighbouring country, should be nothing at home. The sense of literary restraint became daily more oppressive. Writers felt dissatisfied with private controversies on forbidden subjects; they longed for the broad day of publicity enjoyed by English philosophers. The French Parliament likewise envied the authority of the English Commons; similar feelings pervaded every class: the nobles felt wounded at the servility to which they were compelled by the monarch; the higher clergy submitted impatiently to the yoke of royal authority; whilst the tiers-état, or bourgeoisie, disliked the nobles and priests, because they saw them, though weak and powerless, in possession of the most valuable privileges. Had the upper classes been strong and active, the hardship would not have been felt so much: the logic of practical life teaches that power and privilege must associate; but they were feeble and corrupt. All that was left of the old feudal system was the inequality of ranks: the good it effected had vanished; the evil remained.

This spirit of discontent was increased by the writings of the exiled and persecuted Huguenots, who had taken refuge in Holland or England. Their works, full of bitter attacks on Louis XIV. and Catholicism, were, in spite of every prohibition, introduced in France; where they spread the hatred of

the monarch and of the Church, without serving the Protestant faith: which, like Jansenism, was only used as a form of opposition to the ruling power. Amongst these writers were some whose enmity had a much deeper object than the annoyance of their persecutor. Their chief was Bayle, who always wavered between the Protestant and Catholic faiths; unable to fix his mind on either creed.

Bayle seems to have written to shew the vanity of all belief: his scepticism was not, however, a creed, like that of the French Encyclopédists; who were as intolerant as their opponents. His mind, which gave him plausible reasons for everything, was too impartial for enthusiasm. But the immense research to which he devoted his whole life, and the merciless patience with which he accumulated all the destructive facts and arguments likely to bear on any subject he had taken in hand, rendered his works, what they have been truly termed, "an arsenal," from which the French philosophers, and Voltaire especially, drew their most fatal weapons.

This sceptical contempt extended even to literature. The faith in ancient art, so characteristic of the seventeenth century in France, almost vanished with the new era. La Mothe, though a poet, (a weak one, it is true,) attacked versification, as a superfluous mode of expressing what could as well be told in prose. In spite of the learned Madame Dacier's indignation, he endeavoured, like Perrault, to lower Homer from the high rank assigned him by the admiration of ages. Though this heresy of art produced no important result, it announced the coming of other times, when judgment would replace traditionary reverence and implicit belief. Freethinking soon became synonymous with taste and philosophy; the keen wish for discussion on forbidden subjects could no longer be confined within the limits of a fashionable drawing-room: sceptical philosophers resorted to the public coffee-houses, where, by using fictitious terms, they succeeded in carrying on warm controversies, in spite of the police spies. The gardens of the Tuileries were frequented by ardent politicians; and loudly expressed wishes for the beginning of a

new reign, might be heard under the windows of the royal palace.

Such were the varied elements of which declining society consisted at the close of Louis the Fourteenth's long reign: a gloomy court, rendered austere by the king, but which still remained impure at heart; a weak clergy; licentious nobles; a deeply discontented bourgeoisie; a host of daring thinkers, impatient to attack the old social edifice; women of great wit, but little virtue, capriciously exerting their almost sovereign influence—everywhere the traces of forthcoming dissolution.

The political condition of France was equally gloomy and precarious. The extravagant war, undertaken against the half of Europe, in order to place the monarch's grandson on the throne of Spain, had reduced the kingdom to a state of great distress. Through the influence of Madame de Maintenon and Chamillart, the minister of her making, weak and imbecile generals were opposed to the first captains of the age. Another fatal error was to clog the motions of those generals, with the timid measures decided upon by the king and his over-cautious minister, in the boudoir of Madame de Maintenon. The war thus protracted, instead of being brought to a close, assumed a most alarming aspect for France, and overshadowed with melancholy forebodings the close of a reign once celebrated for its greatness and magnificence. When this struggle had at length been brought to a favourable issue, Louis XIV. was overwhelmed with grief by the successive deaths of his only son the Dauphin, the Duchess of Burgundy, her husband, their young child, and the Duke of Berri, the king's youngest grandson. Of his numerous legitimate descendants, the only survivors were Philip V. of Spain, and his great-grandchild, the Duke of Anjou. The sudden deaths of all these royal individuals were attended by such singular symptoms, that the majority of the nation attributed them to poison administered by the Duke of Orleans. The prince studied chemistry under a foreign savant, named Homberg, and he was immediately accused of being skilled in

poisons, and of wishing, through this means, to make himself a way to the throne. The Duke of Orleans, whom these calumnies drove to despair, requested the king to send him to the Bastile, in order to a await a regular trial. Louis refused: though he disliked his nephew, he could not believe in his guilt. The accusations directed against him, nevertheless influenced the policy he adopted with regard to the regency of the kingdom. Whilst he nominally confided it to the Duke of Orleans, he placed the real power in the hands of his own illegitimate son, the Duke of Maine. To this he was greatly urged by Madame de Maintenon, who, having educated his natural children, loved them with the tenderness of a mother. Already had she obtained for them the decree which effaced the illegitimacy of their birth, declared them princes of the blood, and gave them the right of succession to the crown. Not satisfied with this, she next wrung from Louis a testament wholly in favour of the Duke of Maine. He complied, without deceiving himself as to the extent of the respect or obedience his once absolute will would receive when he had been removed by death.

The power of Madame de Maintenon over such a strong mind as that of Louis XIV. is a singular feature in the history of his reign. This remarkable woman, whom posterity has judged more impartially than her contemporaries, seems to have been disliked chiefly because her austerity, which she communicated to the king, repressed the impatience and licentiousness of the young generation. Notwithstanding all that has been asserted to her prejudice, she certainly possessed many eminent qualities. Though not gifted with the brilliant wit of her rival, Madame de Montespan, she was remarkable for great good sense, exquisite tact, and a severe simplicity which seemed to reject, for both her mind and her person, all the embellishments of art. The early history of this celebrated woman is too well known to be related here. From the widow of the burlesque poet, Scarron, she became, at the age of fifty-two, the wife of one of the greatest kings of Europe. Though her marriage was never acknowledged,

she was queen in reality. Her patient ambition had raised her from obscurity to a throne; but this feeling was, with her, void of energy or greatness. The few political acts in which she participated were marked by the timidity and cautiousness of her character. She did too much to be forgiven by her enemies, and too little to crush them. She had none of the commanding qualities which exact respect, even whilst they may excite hatred. In her friendships, she shewed, to the last, both the natural coldness of her character, and her want of moral courage. Her influence over her contemporaries was merely transient; she was naturally grave and austere, and in her old age she became devout and intolerant. She succeeded in imparting enough of these qualities to the king to add to the gloom of his court. At the death of Louis XIV., her power ceased; and when she retired to Saint Cyr, the outward respect which had been paid, till then, to modesty and virtue vanished from the court of France. The only portion of her political influence which survived her, was that which she exerted for the Duke of Maine. This woman, who never asked anything for herself or for her relatives, was constantly importuning the king for his legitimised son. She spared no effort in order to secure the testament which was to raise her beloved pupil to power.

There must have been something inexpressibly bitter for the old king in those intrigues, tending to remind him daily of his approaching end, and carried on by those most dear to him. The unhappy state of the country added to his melancholy. His wars and extravagance had reduced France to the brink of ruin: her finances had fallen into a most deplorable condition. But, whilst Louis entertained a bitter consciousness of his errors, he had not the courage to repair them: he left the arduous task to his successor. Though he bore his misfortunes with dignity, the people could not forgive him the shame and misery he had brought down on France. The shadow of that idolatrous homage, so long granted to him, now alone remained. Fear and hatred filled almost every heart. The king had ceased to be invincible; and, though he

displayed more moral greatness in his last years than during any other portion of his life, the grandeur with which he had dazzled the nation so long had vanished for ever. Those who had seen him surrounded by Colbert, Condé, Turenne, Corneille, Racine, and Molière, were no more. His former greatness was merely traditionary, whilst the reverses caused by his ambition were still recent. Louis himself, who seemed conscious of having lived too long for his fame, beheld his last hour undismayed. Before his end, he had an opportunity of testing the truth of the protestations he had made on the vanity of life and of an earthly crown; for, when it was known that he had only a few hours more to live, the courtiers deserted the royal palace, in order to gather round the Duke of Orleans, or his rival, the Duke of Maine. Even Madame de Maintenon abandoned the dying monarch, and, fearing her numerous enemies, retired beforehand to Saint Cyr. Louis vainly asked for her: she was gone. Only a few menials remained near the deathbed of the monarch, who, for nearly a century, had filled all Europe with the splendid follies and hollow glory of his reign.

CHAPTER I.

THE REGENT—HIS COURT AND HIS FAMILY.

Louis XIV. had not yet been laid near his ancestors, in the Royal Abbey of Saint Denis, when the deep reaction caused by his death, in the general aspect of society, became apparent. By the mere force of his despotic will, the late monarch had prolonged the spirit of the seventeenth century beyond its natural limits; and it is only from the accession of Louis XV. that the eighteenth century can, philosophically speaking, be dated.

The death of the aged sovereign was welcomed with a feeling akin to joy, by the nation who had so long idolised his very name. The unhappy and starving people, who ascribed all their misery to his extravagance and overweening ambition, and who, during the last years of his reign, had often muttered curses not loud but deep, now openly exulted over the death of the tyrant. The signs of gladness exhibited at his funeral, when the people sang and drank on the road leading to Saint Denis, were too open to be misunderstood. Before plunging into the wild excesses of the regency, the nation seemed to exult at the removal of that stern restraint beneath which it had bowed so long.

This spirit of animosity against the will of the late monarch, tended to consolidate the power of the regent.

The death of Louis XIV. called to the throne, under the name of Louis XV., a sickly child, five years of age. The next heirs to the crown were—his uncle, Philip V. of Spain; the Duke of Orleans; the Princes of Condé and Conti; and Louis the Fourteenth's legitimised sons, the Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse. The treachery of one of Madame

de Maintenon's friends had rendered the Duke of Orleans acquainted with the contents of the monarch's testament. Before allowing the parliament to examine the document, he therefore caused them to recognise his right to the regency, as first prince of the blood; and adroitly promised to restore the ancient right of addressing remonstrances to the crown, of which they had been deprived by Louis XIV. The testament was then opened: it nominally gave the regency to the Duke of Orleans, but the real power was awarded by it to the Duke of Maine. The parliament were favourably disposed towards this prince, whose wife had long endeavoured to secure their good-will, through the President de Mesmes, promising, in case the testament were confirmed, to restore their privileges; but the Duke of Orleans appealed to their decision, whilst his rival affected to draw his right solely from his father's will. By supporting the claims of the former, which were also the most just, the parliament had, therefore, the satisfaction of boldly asserting their authority in opposition to that of the late monarch; whilst the mere act of deciding between two princes of the blood, who appeared before them as rival candidates for the regency, was calculated to gratify their vanity and increase their real importance. The will of Louis XIV. was, therefore, entirely set aside, and the Duke of Orleans invested with unlimited authority.

The Duke of Maine, though not void of ambition, was too timid to venture on more than feeble remonstrances. After seeing himself despoiled by the parliament of all the advantages secured to him by his late father's will, the superintendence of the young king's education alone excepted, he silently retired, to meet the bitter reproaches of his violent and ambitious wife.

Society now assumed a wholly new aspect. The regent followed the plans of the Duke of Burgundy, and, rejecting the despotic centralisation adopted by the late king, divided the unity of government by creating fifty-two state counsellors. Instead of the servile adulation which had so long greeted the name of Louis XIV., the most bitter opprobrium

was now heaped upon his memory, with comparative impunity, by a host of virulent pamphleteers. Jansenism, which he had persecuted, was tolerated; the spirit of freedom and equality he had sternly checked, accompanied this reaction. The President de Mesmes was the first individual of inferior rank who presumed to go into deep mourning, the privilege of high birth, after the monarch's death. To complete the contrast, the court, from that appearance of austere devotion which it had worn under Madame de Maintenon, passed to the most open profligacy. The courtiers adapted themselves to the change with Protean facility. The old doting Duke of Noailles, whose hypocritical piety had won the favour of Louis XIV., now affected to patronise an opera dancer, in order to pay his court to the regent, and appeared disgracefully intoxicated at the opera ball on the first night of its opening. These public balls had been suggested to the regent by the Chevalier de Bouillon, who was rewarded with a pension of 6000 *livres* for his fortunate idea. As the opera then stood in the gardens of the Palais Royal, the Duke of Orleans could pass from a private apartment of his palace into the theatre, mingling unknown with the masked crowd of every rank and class assembled there. The progress of equality was not the result of an acknowledged right, but of the ennui and profligacy of the nobles.

A turbulent and corrupt society was, moreover, adapted to the taste of the regent. Though clever and talented, he was too aristocratic to encourage philosophy and literature by mingling with their professors: intercourse founded on intellectual pursuits levels the artificial distinctions of rank. To such society the regent preferred that of profligate noblemen and abandoned women: though their companionship might degrade the man, he imprudently concluded that it could not lessen the dignity of the prince.

No man was ever so thoroughly identified by his character with the times in which he lived, as Philip of Orleans. His mingled atheism and superstition were the natural result of a mind too conscious of its own immorality not to wish to

deny the existence of an Almighty Being, and too much imbued with native faith to do so with impunity. The regent could not reconcile Christianity, or even deism, with his conduct—which either creed would have reproved; but he could seek for the philosopher's stone, endeavour to penetrate the secrets of futurity through the aid of fortune-tellers, or even, as he confessed to Saint Simon, spend whole hours in adjuring the spirit of evil to appear—and this wild belief laid no check on his conscience: to admit the existence of a God would have filled his inmost being with all the fearful and avenging terrors of self-condemnation. This was why he made so open a boast of his impiety; as though, by shutting himself out from all hope of repentance, he could also have shut out from his soul the light of eternal truth.

This struggle between atheism and belief, led the regent to seek oblivion, alternately, in all the excesses of dissipation, and in varied intellectual pursuits. Chemistry, music, painting, engraving, were succeeded by the most disgraceful orgies. But neither study nor pleasure, nor even power, when he possessed it, could free him from the ennui which unceasingly assailed his soul. This feeling of weariness shewed that the regent, even whilst plunged in corruption, had a mind fitted for better things. His original nature was noble, frank, brave, trusting, and generous; but the notorious Dubois, his preceptor, so perverted his youth, that his moral sense was never fully developed. The young prince was taught to despise human nature before he could judge of it; to look upon love, faith, and friendship, as hollow names; and to consider selfishness the great motive of mankind. Under this teaching, grew up the future regent of France; dissembling, and acting on the maxim of *divide et impera*, whenever he found it convenient, and only indulging in his natural frankness because it was better suited to his humour; never seeking to have a friend, or to be loved by any of his numerous mistresses, because he had no faith either in friendship or in love. This unhappy scepticism neutralised the effect of the regent's best qualities: his kind-

ness of heart was only shewn in good-humoured forbearance towards his enemies; the activity of his intellect, wasted on trifles, could not save him from ennui; and he fully verified his mother's ingenious apologue :—"That though good fairies had gifted her son, at his birth, with numerous qualities, one envious member of the sisterhood had spitefully decreed that he should never know how to use any of these gifts."

These contradictions in a character where atheism, profligacy, and credulity appear mingled with glimpses of a better nature; the wild thirst for excitement, and the deep weariness attendant on its indulgence, are alike characteristic of the regent and of the regency, and have rendered the two names inseparable. Even that deep immorality which led the prince to glory in his errors, thus justifying the severe remark of Louis XIV., "c'est un fanfaron devices," is to be traced throughout that period, the most shameless and corrupt of French history.

A court, to which the prince gave the first example of profligacy, could not but be the home of every vice. The suppers—which took place in a remote apartment of the Palais Royal, where the regent shut himself up with his roués and a few abandoned women, amongst whom often figured his own daughter, the Duchess of Berri—soon acquired a scandalous notoriety, increased by the affected mystery with which they were surrounded. It now became fashionable for every nobleman, and for many high-born ladies, to possess in the suburbs of Paris one of those petites maisons, afterwards so notorious: but which had been recently introduced by the devotees of the court of Louis XIV., who intended them for abodes of prayer and mortification, little foreseeing the very different uses to which they were to be applied. This affected veil of decency only increased the scandal it was destined to conceal: the mere possession of one of these convenient villas was in itself sufficiently significant.

With such a state of society, it is easy to understand that, notwithstanding his profligacy and unprepossessing figure, the Duke of Orleans no sooner became regent, than all the clever

and unprincipled women, who had until then vainly sought a free scope for their intrigues, fixed their eyes upon him, as one whom it required few personal charms to fascinate, and whose yielding temper would allow him to be easily governed. They soon perceived their mistake. No man ever submitted less to the influence of woman than the regent. Neither the female members of his family, nor his numerous mistresses, possessed any share of his confidence. The power which he allowed Dubois to acquire over him shews, however, that the regent was not guided by principle; his motive was the deep and undisguised contempt he entertained for women: a feeling justified by his personal experience, as he had seldom held any intercourse save with the most profligate of their sex.

When the witty Madame de Sabran once attempted to enter into a conversation on state affairs, he led her to a looking-glass, and, with ironical gallantry, asked her if it was suitable to talk of such dull matters to so charming a face? Madame de Sabran took the hint, but avenged herself by declaring at one of the regent's suppers, "that, when man had been created, some of the mud which remained, served to fashion the souls of princes and lacqueys." Her lover only laughed at the sarcasm; which will give an idea of the tone that prevailed on such occasions. The clever and intriguing Madame de Tencin, who spared no pains to captivate the regent, and who even inspired him with a short caprice, was still more unsuccessful. When she attempted to influence him in a political matter, an insulting reply and marked contempt were the only results of her effort. Not even at those suppers, where he fell into the last stage of inebriety, did the prince give the least clue of his political designs to his companions: he avoided, however, surrounding himself with too clever women; and his favourite mistress, Madame de Parabère, owed the preference he granted her over her rivals to the poverty of her intellect and the frivolousness of her character, which prevented her from taking any interest in matters unconnected with her pleasures.

Thus, during the eight years of the regent's sway, women

exercised no influence through him. Those who frequented his court only shared in its profligacy and licentiousness, without rendering it less gross or offensive. A sketch of the female members of the regent's family will suffice to give an idea of that court, and of its prevailing tone.

MADAME, his mother, was a haughty Palatine princess, full of ancestral pride and moral rigidity. She had been married, at an early age, to the only brother of Louis XIV., MONSIEUR, —an indolent, narrow-minded man, whose highest pleasure lay in wearing rouge, patches, and female apparel. Madame, on the contrary, had all the breadth and masculine vigour which her husband lacked; her mind was noble, frank, sincere, and above meanness or disguise: excessive politeness she scorned, as a species of deceit no one ever accused her of practising. Her manners were, like her person, eccentric, and somewhat coarse. Her short, square figure, heavy German countenance, and hands of unrivalled ugliness, contrasted unfavourably with the beauty of the Duke of Orleans's first wife, the lovely and accomplished Henrietta of England.

Madame rendered herself remarkable at the court of France, chiefly for the persevering nationality with which she clung to what she termed "our good old German customs." Tea, coffee, and chocolate, she scorned, as "foreign drugs;" French soups made her ill, and compelled her to comfort her German stomach with ham and sausages. Her greatest boast was that she had introduced sauer kraut into France, and caused Louis XIV. to relish her favourite omelet of salt herrings. Courtly amusements had no charms for her; her masculine tastes and robust constitution made her delight in dogs, horses, hunting, and every species of violent exercise; she disliked dress, as only calculated to draw attention to the plainness of her person: her general costume of a round, close wig like that of a man, and a tight-fitting riding-habit, somewhat increased, however, the grotesque appearance of her square and thick figure.

The honest mind of this princess was never reconciled to the duplicity of the court: where, as she said, falsehood

passed for wit, and frankness for simplicity. Paris seemed to her another Babylon; and when it thundered, she feared lest the impious city should be reduced to ashes. This austere turn, which preserved her from corruption, was joined to excessive pride. This feeling, which convinced her that she had highly honoured her husband by marrying him, also induced her to seclude herself from the court; not deeming the etiquette which was there observed, sufficiently rigorous. To her high indignation, the courtiers were allowed to keep on their hats during the promenade, and even to sit down in the drawing-room of Marly. Of this exaggerated hauteur Madame gave several instances; one of which terminated fatally. Two female adventurers, who claimed the title of Countesses Palatine, were placed by Madame de Maintenon near the person of her niece. Madame's anger, on hearing of the indignity thus offered to her name, was unbounded. Seeing one of the pretended countesses walking with several other persons in a public promenade of Versailles, she went up to her, and, after addressing her in the most opprobrious language, ended by threatening her with such condign punishment, that the unhappy girl, struck with shame and terror, fainted away, and died in a few days. Every one blamed Madame, and Louis told her the honour of her house had been too severely avenged. She replied, with much stateliness, that she liked neither lies nor liars, and, without more compunctious visitings, she dismissed the subject from her mind. A character which, notwithstanding its honesty and truth, was so little remarkable for amiability, did not allow Madame to exercise much influence at the court of her brother-in-law; where she seems to have had but one friend, Louis XIV., and one enemy, Madame de Maintenon. Nothing could remove the mutual antipathy of these two women. Madame's hatred was coarse, violent, and prejudiced: she loaded the king's secret wife with abuse, and literally believed her to be in the habit of poisoning her enemies. Madame de Maintenon's animosity was more cool and active: she strove to lessen the influence of Madame over the monarch's mind;

and, what was more easy, to injure her son, the Duke of Orleans, who had deeply offended her. The two rivals not only hated, but despised one another. The haughty German princess knew that the royal favourite had not attained that high position without practising arts, to which the prospect of an empire would not have induced her to stoop; whilst the philosophic Madame de Maintenon looked down with secret scorn on the proud Palatine princess, who could be so wrapped up in the glory of her ancestors as to feel indifferent to the reality of power, though she rigorously exacted the vain shadow of etiquette due to her rank. So little, indeed, was Madame consulted, that the marriage between her son and Mademoiselle de Blois, daughter of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan, was agreed upon without her knowledge. Her indignation, at what she considered a degrading alliance, was such, that, on meeting her son in the gallery of Versailles, she gave him a slap on the face, in the presence of a host of witnesses. The poor prince, who had only yielded a reluctant consent to the match, needed not this new mortification.

Madame did not possess more power under the regency: she was of opinion that France had already been too much governed by women for its welfare, and never sought to interfere but once. This was when her son was named regent: she then exacted from him a solemn promise that he would never employ Dubois in any official capacity. Though the regent gave her his word that her request should be obeyed, it was not long ere Madame learned that he had eluded his promise: she attempted no further political interference, but remained satisfied with her son's affection and respectful behaviour.

"Although my son is regent," she observes in one of her letters, "he never comes to see me, nor even parts from me, without kissing my hand before I embrace him; nor will he allow me to hand him a seat. Nevertheless he is not timid, but speaks freely: indeed, we laugh and chat together in a very friendly manner."

It was, perhaps, to beguile the ennui of her secluded life,

that Madame began that voluminous correspondence, of which a few extracts have been published under the name of her memoirs: she, literally, seemed to live for no other purpose than that of writing to her German relations, many of whom she had never seen, but whom she loved; and, according to the degree of their relationship, with a fervour which had never allowed her to forgive Louis XIV. for remarking, "that it was *bien bourgeois* to be fond of one's relatives." Each day was devoted to different correspondents, whom Madame regaled with all the scandal of the court. Though her zeal was unwearied, she confesses that when she had written in one day about twenty pages to the Princess of Wales—afterwards Queen of George II.—ten or twelve to her daughter, the Duchess of Lorraine, and about twenty more to the Queen of Sicily, she felt in need of repose.

With her son's wife, the Duchess of Orleans, Madame could never agree. To forgive her for being the daughter of Madame de Montespan, would have been impossible: she might, however, have been mollified by a proper degree of humility; but the young duchess, who overlooked the illegitimacy of her birth to remember that she was the daughter of Louis XIV., felt convinced she had greatly honoured her husband by marrying him. She was handsome, haughty, and apathetic; satisfied with the Duke of Orlean's show of respect, she appeared unconcerned at his numerous infidelities: even before her marriage she confessed that she cared not for his affection, and only wanted the rank of his wife. Her children were almost strangers to her: her brothers seemed to be the chief objects of her affection; and she was not without hopes of exercising, through them, the political influence her husband had not allowed her to take over him. Owing to her excessive indolence, the superintendence of the education of her three eldest daughters devolved upon Madame; whose correspondence was grievously disturbed by these new cares. Those three princesses were, the Duchess of Berri, Mademoiselle de Valois, and Mademoiselle de Chartres.

Madame de Berri, who had been married at an early age to

Louis the Fourteenth's youngest grandson, was a handsome but violent and sensual woman. Her abandoned profligacy recalled that of those dissolute princesses, who filled Rome with the scandal of their excesses, towards the decline of the empire. Her inordinate ambition had induced her to lay those inclinations under control until her marriage was over; but two days after the ceremony, she was brought home intoxicated from a supper at court. Her intemperance and profligacy henceforth became notorious. Her husband, who was at first passionately attached to her, soon grew disgusted with her conduct. This feeling was increased by the impiety she affected in her conversations with her father, who had brought her up in his atheistical principles. So reckless did Madame de Berri become, that she seriously insisted on flying from the kingdom with her favourite lover, la Haye. The danger, however, terrified him: he revealed everything to her father, who, with much difficulty, made her give up this wild plan. The early death of her husband, by giving her more freedom, increased her license; and the accession of the regent to power, removed the slight restraint imposed upon her by Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon.

Her arrogance, which had always been great, henceforth became excessive. She spared nothing to humble her own mother, whom she hated for being the daughter of Madame de Montespan. Between her and Madame there existed an endless quarrel on the right of precedence, and other matters of etiquette. Owing to the weakness of her father, Madame de Berri soon assumed the style of a sovereign princess: she gave orders of banishment, crossed Paris to the warlike sound of trumpets, and received foreign ambassadors, enthroned in state under a canopy. Even whilst degrading herself by every vice, she exacted the deepest outward homage, and learned, with indignation, that her princely rank could not exempt her from the contempt due to her profligacy. She felt an instinctive hatred for those women whose conduct seemed to reprove her own. Her jealousy of Madame du Maine was excessive: she could not forgive her the contrast

which the *nuits blanches* of Sceaux, that home of elegance and refinement, offered to the scandalous orgies of the Luxembourg, where she resided.

Notwithstanding her atheism and licentiousness, Madame de Berri had sudden fits of terror and devotion, which led her to retire occasionally to a convent of Carmelites. The whole sisterhood were then edified by the fervour she displayed, and some of the simple-minded nuns deplored, in her presence, the malice of those who calumniated so pious a princess. Madame de Berri laughed to hear them speak thus; and, after a few days spent in austerity, returned to her former mode of life. Her chief lover was Riom, a nobleman of high birth, but whose brutality and revolting personal appearance shewed the depravity of this unhappy woman's taste. Her love for him resembled infatuation, and increased with his harshness and tyranny. Riom only followed in this the lessons of his uncle Lauzun; the same who was secretly married to Mademoiselle de Montpensier, and who averred that the Bourbons required to be led with a high hand. Madame de Berri soon became the slave of her lover, who loaded her with public insults, and made her receive into her intimacy his obscure or degraded companions; though, according to the laws of etiquette, no man, unless he were a prince of the blood, could be admitted at her table. The regent, indignant, not so much at his daughter's immorality as at the power assumed by Riom, often threatened to chastise his insolence; but Madame de Berri, who exercised over her father the ascendancy which her lover possessed over her, became so violent and irritated, that the duke was glad to ask for his forgiveness. The scandal caused by this intrigue increased, when it was known that the princess had given birth to a child in the palace of Luxembourg. As she was dangerously ill, the curé of Saint-Sulpice offered her the rites of the Church. She accepted; but when he came and made it a condition that Riom and her confidante, Madame de Mouchy, should both leave the palace, she refused indignantly. The regent interfered, but could not induce either his daughter or the priest to relent. When he

appealed to the cardinal of Noailles, the austere prelate approved the conduct of the curé, and ordered him not to leave the chamber-door of the princess, lest some more complaisant priest should administer to her privately. The curé obeyed, and whenever he was compelled to abandon his post, he caused another clergyman to replace him. When Madame de Berri was pronounced out of danger, he retired; but not till then. His conduct, which created great scandal, was nevertheless generally approved, as a bold and uncompromising reproof administered to the corruption of the age.

Madame de Berri vainly sought to lessen the effect of this disgraceful affair, by devoting herself and her whole household to the Virgin, for the space of six months; during which time they appeared clad in white from head to foot, to the great amusement of the Parisians. The increasing influence of Riom, and the terrors of her own conscience, at length induced Madame de Berri to contract a private marriage with her lover: she even determined on acknowledging herself publicly as his wife. The fatal illness which carried her to the grave, prevented her from fulfilling this project. She long refused to believe in her approaching end, which she hastened by her intemperance; but, on becoming convinced of her danger, she resolved to pass from this world to the next with the pomp and solemnity suited to her high rank. Lying on a bed of state, and surrounded by the hushed and attentive members of her household, the dying princess, after bidding them all a last farewell, received the rites of the Church in their presence. When the ceremony was over, she proudly asked one of her attendants, "if this was not dying with courage and greatness?" Her relatives were, however, so much embarrassed by the notoriety of her ill-conduct, that they had her conveyed privately to Saint Denis, and buried without pomp. Even the effrontery of the age could not have tolerated her funeral eulogy. Madame was at first much grieved at the death of her grand-daughter; but, on learning that she had actually been married to her lover, she indignantly dried her tears. The pride of birth superseded every other feeling.

Madame had, moreover, never been much attached to her son's eldest daughter, whose conduct was only calculated to dishonour her high rank: her favourite was Mademoiselle de Chartres, a beautiful and eccentric girl, who indulged in masculine amusements; delighting in dogs and horses, and firing off pistols all the day long. She had all her father's versatility of talent: theology, music, surgery, fireworks, and even wig and flower-making, were her chief occupations; but, like the regent, she could find no real pleasure in those varied tasks. Her strong Jansenist turn induced her to enter a convent, and take religious vows; her relatives vainly opposed this determination: she carried her point, and became abbess of the convent of Chelles, in her eighteenth year. This event produced no change in her mode of life. Mother Bathilda, as she was now called, still indulged in her love for dogs, horses, and fireworks; completely destroying the peace of the poor recluses, whom she bled and doctored herself when they happened to be ill, and tormented, when they were in good health, by her alternate indulgence and austerity. Growing weary of her power, the young abbess at length resigned it in favour of one of her friends. This was no sooner effected than she wished to regain her freedom. After some negotiation she removed to the Benedictine convent of la Madeleine du Fresnel, where she occupied a handsome apartment, and spent the remainder of her life; her active mind leading her to study the most abstruse and the most futile subjects alternately, and, whatever she did, still leaving her a prey to unconquerable ennui.

Mademoiselle de Valois, her sister, is chiefly celebrated for her attachment for the Duke of Richelieu; whom she was said to introduce into her apartment in the Palais Royal through means of a mysterious cupboard, supposed to contain preserves. Madame, to whom she gave an infinite deal of trouble, disliked her, and was so highly incensed at Richelieu's audacity, that she once sent him word not to approach the place where she then was with her grand-daughter, if he valued his life. The duke thought it prudent to obey.

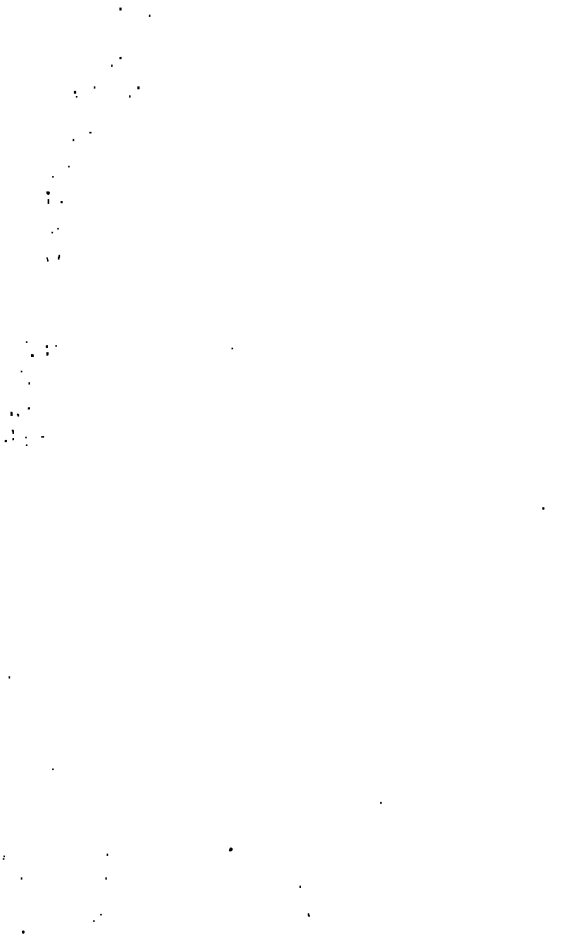
When the regent wished to marry Mademoiselle de Valois to the Prince of Piedmont, Madame candidly informed his mother, the Queen of Sicily, of the young princess's intrigue with Richelieu. The match was immediately broken off. Though at first annoyed by his mother's indiscretion, the regent ended by laughing at it; but it is likely that this proof of her secrecy in diplomatic matters confirmed him in the resolve of not granting her any political influence. The character of Madame would not have allowed her to possess any other. She felt no sympathy with the world in which she lived, and it had none for her. When her death occurred in 1722, she was scarcely missed from the court of France. But even those who did not appreciate her real worth respected her, and she was universally acknowledged to be one of the few princesses of the royal family whose virtue remained beyond suspicion.

Her contemporaries called her a woman of the olden time, and many of those who saw her secluding herself in uncompromising austerity from a corrupt court, must indeed have been strongly reminded of one of those stiff, gaunt figures of the old masters, rudely drawn, and ungainly in their bearing, but full of truth, originality, and sterling worth.

The characters of the other female relatives of the regent are more significant, so far as regards their epoch, than that of Madame. The apathetic pride of the Duchess of Orleans, the abandoned profligacy of her daughters, the Duchess of Berri and Mademoiselle de Valois, the eccentric and restless spirit of Mademoiselle de Chartres, paint the court of the regent: that home of wild, unbridled license, where woman was too much fallen to exercise any power.

In regarding those licentious times, we perceive that this utter recklessness of public opinion springs from the thirst of excitement which fills a decaying society. Wild systems, which appeal to the covetousness and prodigality of the masses, then prevail; atheistical princes disdain to believe in a God, whilst they study the occult sciences; degraded women openly sully the most illustrious names of France—

all seem to feel that the reign of the aristocracy is drawing to a close, and endeavour to give themselves a fictitious youth by excesses, which only betray the corruption of old age. And, as though to mark how deep is the seat of that corruption, a princess, of undoubted virtue, thinks it more dishonourable for her grand-daughter to become the wife of a private nobleman, than to be his acknowledged mistress.



CHAPTER II.

MADAME DU MAINE—THE SOCIETY OF SCEAUX—THE CELLAMARE CONSPIRACY.

THE influence which the regent did not allow woman to possess at his court, was soon exercised in favour of his enemies. Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon-Condé, Duchess of Maine, was the acknowledged chief of the strong and dangerous party opposed to his power; her high rank, talents, and ambition rendered her influence formidable; and had she only been able to impart her own active and energetic spirit to her husband, the Duke of Orleans would not have obtained the regency without a severe struggle.

The influence of Madame du Maine was increased by the universal seduction she exercised,—a seduction the more remarkable that she was neither beautiful nor striking in her personal appearance. Her figure was not good, and was as slight and diminutive as that of a child; her manner was lively and petulant; but she could, when she chose, give it a haughty dignity, which at once betrayed the daughter of the proud and princely Condés. She had the features of her race—more characteristic and expressive than beautiful; with light-coloured hair, a good complexion spoiled by rouge, and fine, expressive eyes, which often lit up her countenance with sudden beauty. She was naturally clever, and had received an excellent classical education. Her wit was light and brilliant; her language rapid, precise, and singularly felicitous. The art of talking well was seldom carried further than at her little court: both she and her husband excelled in this gift; they had probably acquired it from the duke's mother, Madame de Montespan, who was celebrated for the hereditary

wit of the Mortemarts, and imparted her pure and elegant phraseology to those who lived in her intimacy. The character of Madame du Maine, which was a compound of superficial wit, ambition, and caprice, did not adapt her, however, to the high political part she was anxious to act. She was bold, active, and vehement, but deficient in moral courage. She could struggle long and perseveringly for any object in view,—and whether this object was the discovery of the magic square or the regency of the kingdom, she displayed equal energy: but there was more restlessness than determination in her character; and she never learned to bear, with even common equanimity, the misfortunes occasioned by her own imprudence. Her temper was violent, fickle, and selfish. Notwithstanding her wit and learning, she had a great horror of solitude and ennui, and could not dispense with the society of those individuals for whom she cared least. "I am very fond of company," she frankly said, "for I listen to no one, and every one listens to me." She was accordingly seldom to be found alone. The crowd which surrounded her was not always very select. Her old admirer, Saint-Aulaire, who professed a romantic passion for her, and whom she called her shepherd, tired of this noisy and uninteresting assemblage, once impatiently asked her what she wanted with persons so little suited to her. "My dear shepherd," she candidly answered, "I am so unhappy as not to be able to do without that which I do not need in the least." This frankness originated in the Duchesse du Maine from temperament, reasoning, and selfish indifference to those around her. "I never tell a lie—I never attempt to dissemble," she once composedly observed; "because I know very well that no one can ever be deceived." Notwithstanding the numerous faults which she unreservedly displayed to her most devoted adherents, there was about this clever and volatile princess an irresistible charm, that never failed to fascinate those who lived in her intimacy.

Her Royal Highness was not only fond of intellectual company; she also liked to indulge in those literary and platonic

friendships set in fashion by the précieuses of the Hotel Rambouillet, a few of whom she had known in her younger days. She was accordingly surrounded, at her residences of Sceaux and Anet, with a chorus of adoring and versifying shepherds, of whom Saint-Aulaire was the chief, and who, even when the princess's few charms had long faded away, affected a mortal jealousy of one another. Amongst these shepherds, Malesieu, her grave tutor in classical lore, held high literary sway. "His decisions," says the lively Madame de Staal, "had the same infallibility as those of Pythagoras with his disciples. The most ardent disputes were silenced as soon as the words, *he has said it*, were heard."

La Mothe, the relentless foe of versification, ranked amongst the platonic admirers of Madame du Maine. Her correspondence with him, though little known and less read, still exists: it is the very essence of that light and frivolous *esprit*, which is rather an agreeable intellectual vivacity, than what we call wit. Those letters, if not intended for publication, were at least written to be widely read, like almost all the letters of this artificial period; Madame du Maine's were gravely discussed at the house of Madame de Lambert, where a polite assembly met every Tuesday. The princess, in her turn, circulated the epistles she received amongst her jealous shepherds. She playfully complains to De la Mothe of their tyranny; and he, in the same tone, explains the transports he experienced on receiving her last letter, brought expressly from Sceaux by a courier. Notwithstanding the insignificance of the whole correspondence, the feeling that it need never have been written, and that it is scarcely worth being read, it nevertheless possesses a certain nameless and well-bred grace of its own, which carries us back at once to the polished and frivolous circles of those times.

The amusements and platonic affections of Madame du Maine did not absorb her so far as to deaden her ambition. Her volatile temper rendered her no great favourite with either the austere old king or his sedate wife: she nevertheless paid her court very assiduously; and, taking advantage

of the great friendship Madame de Maintenon felt for her husband, earnestly besought to be considered as her daughter. The king, Madame de Maintenon, and Madame du Maine, all laboured to effect the aggrandisement of the duke; who, though not without ambition, was too weak and timid to labour in his own cause. The violent temper of his wife—little as she was, she had the reputation of beating him—and her tumultuous amusements at Sceaux, made him live with as great a degree of retirement as he could indulge in. Deformed, grave, and learned, he occupied himself with translations from the classics; whilst his active wife moved heaven and earth to secure him the regency at the death of the king. It was quite in vain she endeavoured to rouse him; the Duke of Maine had not even dormant energies to awaken: so his wife had at length discovered, when she bitterly exclaimed: "You will find, on awakening some day, that you are a member of the Academy, and that the Duke of Orleans is regent of the kingdom." Only the latter part of the prediction was fulfilled.

The ambition of Madame du Maine was not purely political. She aimed at being considered the patroness of talent; but, though she could appreciate wit and light literature, she wanted the discernment necessary to encourage genius. Her liking for poetry was very peculiar. She seemed to consider it in the light of an art to be exercised for the particular pleasure of princes and princesses. When she was ill, she said to those around her: "Write verses for me: I feel it is only verses that can give me any relief." Her patronage of literary men proved useful, however, to her political designs, and was favoured by the carelessness of the regent; who allowed "the little wasp of Sceaux," as he called her, to gather around her all the malcontents whom his government had made. It was in her magnificent residence at Sceaux, where she lived in almost royal style, that Madame du Maine carried on her ambitious plans, under the mask of frivolous amusements connected with her order of the Honey Bee; and that she received, with inimitable grace and tact, the

guests whom her inclination or her policy had drawn together. Seldom had there been seen an assemblage more brilliant in wit or in courtly graces, than that which gathered in the shady gardens of Sceaux. Elegant and accomplished women, many of them remarkable for their beauty, and a few for intrigues, over which they threw at least a veil of decency unknown at the court of the regent, daily mingled with men of great wit and talents, which were too often wasted in those entertaining, but unprofitable assemblies.

Amongst Madame du Maine's most constant guests were the President Henault, known for his songs and bon mots; the old Saint-Aulaire, whose hopeless passion for the duchess was expressed in languishing madrigals; Malesieu, her learned tutor, who read the tragedies of Sophocles to this careless assemblage; Chaulieu, the gay abbé and charming poet, whose wit, naïveté, and finesse, seemed unimpaired by old age; Genest, author of admired tragedies now forgotten, who has bequeathed to posterity a faithful account of the gaieties of Sceaux; and Vaubrun, the grave and obsequious courtier, who treated trifles with solemn gravity, lived in an atmosphere of fêtes, polite phrases, and etiquette, till he was actually termed, by Madame du Maine, "le sublime du frivole." The seductions of this witty and refined society attracted many occasional visitors; of these were the brilliant Fontenelle; La Mothe, the ingenious antagonist of Madame Dacier; J. B. Rousseau, the poet, and that young and daring Arouet, who had not yet acquired European fame under the name of Voltaire. A few of Madame du Maine's guests were destined to serve her political views. The handsome, eloquent, and insinuating Cardinal de Polignac, who plotted with her against the regent, vainly affected to be absorbed by his Latin poem of "Anti-Lucrèce," in order to give a literary cloak to his visits. The gloomy and bitter poet, Lagrange Chancel, took less pains to conceal that hatred of the regent which he expressed in his powerful, though repulsive, philippics. De Mêsmes, the president, through whom Madame du Maine influenced the parliament, and

the ambitious young Duke of Richelieu, were amongst those guests whom common interests, more than sympathy with its mistress, drew to Sceaux.

The individuals who composed this elegant little court, shared their days between intellectual pursuits and luxurious indolence. The madrigals of M. de Saint-Aulaire, or the epistles of Chaulieu; the philippics of Lagrange Chancel; fragments of Arouet's Œdipe, that bitter satire of the regent's profligacy; M. du Maine's translation of the Cardinal de Polignac's Anti-Lucrèce, and other productions, since buried in oblivion, ministered to their daily amusement. The evenings were devoted to the card-table, to dancing, theatrical performances, and fêtes in the open air, of the duchess's fantastical order of the Honey Bee. The women who shared this frivolous existence are, with a few exceptions, unknown to posterity: one of them, however, has left a name destined to survive the short-lived glitter of those splendid festivities, in which her humble condition forbade her to mingle openly. We allude to Mademoiselle de Launay, whose charming Memoirs have rendered her so well known, under the name of Baroness of Staal, but who was then only one of Madame du Maine's femmes de chambres.

A series of misfortunes had reduced Mademoiselle de Launay to this lowly station. Obscure by her birth, but superior to most women of rank by the brilliant education she had received in a convent of Normandy, of which the abbess had taken her under her express protection, the young girl grew up in a refined atmosphere, and surrounded by all the luxuries of wealth. Her studies shewed the bent of her mind: she cared little for poetry and music, but made considerable progress in geometry, and even took a tincture of anatomy; Mallebranche and Des Cartes were her favourite authors. Though her personal attractions were never great, her graceful wit gained her many admirers, amongst whom were Vertot, the celebrated historian, and a gentleman named Rey, whose feelings, though at first very ardent, gradually cooled. Of this Mademoiselle de Launay soon acquired geo-

metrical proof. M. de Rey was in the habit of seeing her home, occasionally, from the house of a mutual friend. "We were then obliged," she observes, "to cross a wide place, and, in the commencement of our acquaintance, he always walked along the sides of this place; but I now saw that he simply traversed it in the middle, whence I concluded that his love had diminished in the same proportion which exists between the diagonal of a square and the sides of the same." Mademoiselle de Launay's geometry was evidently practical.

The death of her benefactress threw her, unprotected, on the world at the age of seventeen. Fortunately for herself, the young girl possessed courage and a strong sense of independence. She firmly refused every offer of pecuniary assistance, and proceeded to Paris, where an intimate friend of Madame du Maine, the Duchess de la Ferté, took her under her protection. This kind, though capricious lady, was greatly pleased with Mademoiselle de Launay, whom she exhibited to her acquaintances in the character of a prodigy, regardless of the humiliation and deep shame of her protégée. "Come, mademoiselle," she once exclaimed, in the presence of a friend, "speak." To the visitor: "You will hear how she talks. Speak a little about religion,—you can say something else afterwards." Though thus put to the test, Mademoiselle de Launay's conversational powers did not desert her. The reputation of her wit soon extended to the little court of Madame du Maine, who thought of confiding to her the education of her own daughter. But, as the first novelty of her appearance wore off, the plan was abandoned. The fickle Duchess de la Ferté became, moreover, offended with her protégée; and when Mademoiselle de Launay applied to Malesieu for the place which had been promised her, he replied, that the only place Madame du Maine could offer now was that of attendant on her own person. The unhappy girl had no resource but to submit to this degrading offer: she keenly felt, however, the humiliations of her new position. Those persons who had admired her most during her temporary éclat, now affected to shun her; and Madame du

Maine, on whom she waited daily, scarcely deigned to seem conscious of her existence. A trifling incident drew her from this obscurity.

A beautiful girl, named Mademoiselle Tétard, who endeavoured to pass herself off for an inspired sybil, had drawn down some ridicule on Fontenelle: the celebrated author of the "Histoire des Oracles" was seriously asserted to have acknowledged her power. "De Launay, you ought to write to M. de Fontenelle, and tell him what the world thinks of him," carelessly observed Madame du Maine to her young attendant. Mademoiselle de Launay, who was acquainted with the witty philosopher, wrote to him the same day. Fontenelle was pleased with the graceful raillery of her letter, and shewed it in the evening to some friends, who had, laughingly, brought up the subject of Mademoiselle Tétard. The letter was read and admired; the persons present took copies of it, which were freely circulated over all Paris on the following day. In those times, when a well-turned madrigal could open the doors of the French Academy to Saint-Aulaire, it was only natural that Mademoiselle de Launay's letter should enjoy great success. In the meantime, the writer, unconscious of her sudden popularity, continued to wait on her princely mistress, and to signalise herself by that awkwardness in filling the duties of her place, which had brought her into great contempt among the body of the waiting-maids.

Madame du Maine learned by accident the fame acquired by her attendant: she was astonished, and henceforth took more notice of Mademoiselle de Launay; around whom now secretly gathered many of the remarkable men who came to Sceaux, and who often deserted the saloons of their princely hostess, for the gloomy and comfortless room of her witty femme de chambre.

The Abbé de Vaubrun, the assiduous courtier already alluded to, soon requested Mademoiselle de Launay's assistance for a fête, which Madame du Maine's predilection for late amusements induced him to offer her. The Goddess of Night, personated by Mademoiselle de Launay, accordingly

appeared before her royal highness, and thanked her, in a set speech, for the preference she gave the night over daytime. This was the origin of the *nuits blanches*, to which the courtly Dangeau thus alludes in his journal:—"Monday, 3d of December 1714. Madame, the Duchess of Maine, who is always at Sceaux, and will not return until the end of the month, continues her festivities. She acts Athalie, and the most considerable persons about court are present. From time to time there is also at Sceaux what is called the *nuits blanches*. They are marked by great magnificence and wit."

These festivities were offered to Madame du Maine by her guests, according to an alphabetical lottery which they had established. He who drew out the letter B was bound to give a ballet; C was for comedy; O for opera; and so on with the rest of the alphabet. Mademoiselle de Launay composed for the *nuits blanches* several ingenious plays, which added to their lustre. The death of Louis XIV., and the events by which it was followed, interrupted, for a time, these frivolous gaieties.

Madame du Maine now removed to Paris, and took up her abode in the Tuileries. Mademoiselle de Launay, whose task it was to read her mistress to sleep, soon acquired a large share of her confidence, and was initiated into all her hopes and schemes for the future. But, though she rose so much into favour as to relinquish her duties of attendant, and to be allowed a maid of her own, the occasional hauteur of the duchess never allowed her to forget her subordinate position. The world was less rigorous. Though she had only an obscure little room, without window or fireplace, in which to receive her friends, Mademoiselle de Launay gaily confesses that she was never at a loss for company. The witty Duke of Brancas, Fontenelle, Rémond, and the Abbé de Chaulieu, (who, though blind and near eighty, professed a romantic attachment for her,) were amongst those persons who willingly overlooked the narrow lodging of the young femme de chambre for the sake of her society. The harmless passion of Chaulieu, which he expresses in some of the last verses he ever wrote, rendered

the life of Mademoiselle de Launay very pleasant. His carriage was always at her disposal; he never visited her but with her express permission; and, whenever she agreed to honour them with her presence, he gave elegant fêtes, where the most select company of Paris was assembled, for her amusement. The intrigues of Madame du Maine, in which Mademoiselle de Launay was called to join, soon disturbed this agreeable life.

The active duchess was then busily engaged in repulsing the attacks of her numerous enemies. The weakness of the Duke of Maine encouraged the princes of the blood to protest against the edicts by which the legitimised children of Louis XIV. had been rendered their equals in rank. Madame du Maine answered this attack by a memorial, in which the rights of the legitimised princes were defended by all the arguments ancient or modern history could furnish. She was assisted in her labours by the Cardinal de Polignac, Malesieu, and Mademoiselle de Launay. The hours which had formerly been given to pleasure were now devoted to study; and the bed of the duchess was nightly covered with huge folios, under which, as she laughingly observed, she lay buried, like Enceladus beneath Mount Etna. When excess of fatigue caused her to relinquish her task, she was read to sleep by Mademoiselle de Launay; who, in her turn, endeavoured to snatch a few hours of troubled repose.

The memorial proved ineffectual, and the legitimised princes were deprived of the right of succession to the crown. As an answer to Madame du Maine's threats of revenge, the regent, moreover, took from her husband the superintendence of the young king's education, in presence of the parliament; whose resistance to the introduction of Law's system he ascribed to her influence. The Duke of Maine and the Count of Toulouse, who both assisted at the proceedings, withdrew, on the first hint of the measures which were going to be taken against them. The parliament witnessed the degradation of their protector, and saw their own edicts against Law broken by the regent's council, without venturing to remonstrate. When her

husband and her brother-in-law appeared before her, humble and crest-fallen, Madame du Maine upbraided them for their cowardice, in the most bitter and violent language. The weak President de Mêsmes she treated with deep and sarcastic contempt. When she was compelled to leave the apartment in the Tuileries, attached to the possession of her husband's late office, she displayed her violent temper and want of real dignity, by breaking all the looking-glasses, porcelains, and other fragile ornaments which it contained. Prudent remonstrances she treated with sovereign contempt; and in the height of her exasperation, unhesitatingly exclaimed: "My husband and his brothers are cowards: I—though only a woman—feel myself capable of asking an audience from the regent, and plunging a dagger in his heart."

Madame, who believed "the little dwarf" capable of any violence, felt really alarmed for her son's safety. Though he laughed at her fears, the regent kept a strict watch on the motions of the duchess. Madame du Maine was, indeed, bent upon revenge; her projects were favoured by the state of the country. The liberal policy, affected by the Duke of Orleans at the opening of the regency, was soon relinquished by him; with it vanished his brief popularity. The privileges granted to the parliamentary party had rendered them desirous of emulating the freedom and power of the English Commons. In order to check this spirit, the Duke of Orleans broke their edicts, and finally deprived them of the right of remonstrance. This arbitrary conduct created deep discontent in Paris. The provinces were equally inimical to the regent. The despotic centralisation of monarchy under Richelieu and Louis XIV., which led to future greatness and freedom, was still considered oppressive and tyrannical. The sense of local independence was so strong in Brittany, that the states refused to pay the taxes laid upon them by the regent, and carried on secret intrigues with Alberoni; offering to recognise his master, Philip V., regent, provided their province should become once more an independent duchy. Madame du Maine shewed much ability in turning this general discontent to her own advan-

tage: she encouraged the parliament, promised to aid the Bretons, and conciliated the whole provincial noblesse, by suggesting the convocation of the states-general; a measure which had always involved the kingdom in turmoil, and was, therefore, popular with a restless and ambitious aristocracy.

The influence of the duchess over literature enabled her to increase the unpopularity of the regent. The Œdipe of Voltaire, though patronised by the Duke of Orleans, was an attack against him and Madame de Berri; whom the Parisians soon called Berri-Jocaste: she affected not to understand the allusion, and assisted five times at the popular tragedy for which Voltaire was pensioned by her father. The philippics of La Grange Chancel were more open; every invective, which the most bitter hatred could imagine, was heaped by the misanthropic poet on the regent. When these odious productions were read to him, the prince affected to treat them with his usual carelessness; but, on hearing those lines which accused him of poisoning his relatives, and of administering even now a slow poison to the young king, tears of shame and indignation rolled down the cheeks of Philip of Orleans. La Grange Chancel was severely punished; but the effect of his calumnies remained in the hearts of the people.

The publication of the memoirs of Cardinal de Retz may, however, be considered as the literary coup-d'état of Madame du Maine. Her tutor, Malesieu, found the manuscript amongst forgotten papers in the library of the President de Mêsmes: he softened down a few passages, and gave the memoirs to the public, under the guidance of the duchess. Their success was truly prodigious. Independent of their literary merit, these memoirs, which related to the disorders of the Fronde under the regency of Anne of Austria, gave free scope to hopes and allusions openly encouraged by Madame du Maine; who, belonging to the same family as the beautiful Duchess of Longueville, longed to act, like her, the part of heroine and leader.

The chief intrigues of Madame du Maine were carried on with Spain. Philip V. had agreed to leave her husband the

real power, provided his right of heir-presumptive to the crown were acknowledged by the title of regent. His ambassador, Cellamare, had received instructions from Alberoni to further the views of the duchess by all the means in his power. Her own personal adherents were Malesieu, De Mêsmes, Mademoiselle de Launay, and the Cardinal of Polignac; whose ambition and terrors of discovery alternately hurried on or impeded the motions of the other conspirators. This clever and insinuating prelate was little adapted for the intrigues into which he was led by his love of aggrandisement. His extensive learning and literary tastes fitted him for an elegant retirement, from which his ambition induced him to emerge in the hope of bettering his fortunes. His character was timid and vacillating; he had only a feeble sense of honour, and held no consideration so high as that of his self-preservation. The imprudence of having such a man to share and guide her councils was manifest; but Madame du Maine gave another proof of her heedlessness, by the efforts which she made to secure the assistance of the Duke of Richelieu.

The duke was then in his twenty-second year; he was handsome, was acknowledged to dress inimitably, and two princesses of the royal blood, Mademoiselle de Valois and Mademoiselle de Clermont, of the house of Condé, had quarrelled on his account. The regent, however, mortified him deeply by treating with contempt his pretensions to diplomacy. Alberoni seized this opportunity to write him a letter, in which he praised his *great talents*. The epistle was well-timed; for Richelieu, still smarting from his recent mortification, agreed to give up Bayonne, where his regiment was quartered, and to forward the cause of the Spanish king in the southern provinces. With Madame du Maine's secret views, the duke was not acquainted: she attached, however, great value to his co-operation, and looked upon him as another Fiesche, conspiring in the midst of pleasure.

The Marquis of Pompadour, blindly devoted to Philip V., an adventurer, named the Abbé Brigaut, and the Marquis of Laval, of the noble house of Montmorency—whom his ani-

mosity against the regent, more than his zeal for Madame du Maine, induced to act as her coachman whenever she visited Cellamare—also entered into her plans from motives of personal ambition. Such varied elements of action promised nothing but confusion. The conspirators spoke of a war between France and Spain, concluded that the regent would take the command of the army, fixed on the camp he was to occupy, and talked of carrying him off thence to the castle of Toledo. On this chimerical basis rested the whole plot. Its chief results, in case of success, were to be the deposition of the regent, the aggrandisement of the Duke of Maine, and of a few ambitious partisans, a civil war, and the introduction of a foreign foe. But Madame du Maine had often declared, "that those who had once been princes of the blood, and who with that title possessed the right of succession to the crown, ought to rouse and convulse the whole kingdom sooner than fall from this high rank."

The plot was, however, prematurely discovered, through the imprudence of one of Cellamare's secretaries; who one evening excused himself to his mistress for having delayed his visit, by stating that he had been engaged all day in transcribing important despatches to be sent to Spain. The circumstance soon reached Dubois; he caused the despatches to be seized; they fully incriminated Cellamare and his friends. The ambassador was immediately arrested, as well as Richelieu, Brigaut, Pompadour, and Laval; who were sent to the Bastile. It has been asserted that Dubois and the regent suppressed the strongest proofs against the Duke and Duchess of Maine, and only produced those necessary to justify their apprehension. Before causing Madame du Maine to be arrested, the regent induced the Duke of Bourbon—who, though her nephew, was also her most active enemy—to allow her to be imprisoned in the castle of Dijon, of which he was then governor. The regent's object was to find a secure and distant prison for Madame du Maine, whose spirit and energy rendered her a dangerous captive; and, by placing her under the custody of her own nephew, to impress on the

public mind the reality of her guilt, without the necessity of a trial: which her sex and high rank would have rendered embarrassing.

Though conscious of their approaching arrest, the Duchess of Maine and her husband shewed no uneasiness: they received visitors as usual, and the festivities of Sceaux were not even interrupted. On the evening of the 17th of December 1718, Madame du Maine supped with her friend the Marquis d'Ancenis, captain of the guards; the next morning he entered her apartment at an early hour, and informed her that it was his disagreeable duty to make her his prisoner. The duchess pettishly asked why he had wakened her up so early, and, after some demur, prepared to accompany him. She was at first led to believe that Fontainebleau, or some other royal palace, would be her residence; but when she saw herself conveyed to the castle of Dijon, to be kept there under the custody of her own nephew, her rage knew no bounds. She wept and raved by turns, demanding if this was all the respect paid to her rank. When this fit of passion had subsided, she suddenly submitted to her fate, and played cards all the day long with those persons of her suite who had been allowed to accompany her.

Mademoiselle de Launay was not of the number; she was confined in the Bastile with her faithful maid, who had insisted on sharing her captivity. The Duchess of Bourbon, mother of Madame du Maine, had vainly asked that her daughter might be allowed the society of her favourite femme de chambre. Madame, whose intercession she had requested in this matter, indignantly replied, "That Mademoiselle de Launay was a great intrigante, who had conducted the whole affair; that she was in the Bastile, and deserved to remain there." Mademoiselle de Launay expiated the honour of having been in the confidence of a princess, by a close imprisonment of a year and a half. Her chief amusements, during the first months of her captivity, were the study of the Latin language, and the gambols of a cat and her kittens; which the rats that infested her room had compelled her to

ask for, notwithstanding her previous dislike of animals. She also spoke from her window to Richelieu, who was incarcerated in a different part of the fortress, and, with true French insouciance, they gaily sang together airs from the opera of Iphigenia. M. de Maison-Rouge, lieutenant of the Bastile, was secretly smitten with his fair captive. In order to divert her ennui, he induced her to enter into a playful correspondence with one of her fellow-prisoners, the Chevalier de Ménil; who was indirectly implicated in the Cellamare conspiracy, by having been the depositor of the Abbé Brigaut's papers. Maison-Rouge undertook to be the bearer of their letters, which only ran on the most trifling subjects; and he carried the complaisance so far as to procure them a few interviews. The result, under such romantic circumstances, was a mutual attachment. The imprudent lieutenant soon perceived the state of Mademoiselle de Launay's feelings; but, though he felt deeply grieved, he was too generous to profit by his power. He continued to favour occasional interviews between the lovers, and even to be the messenger of their correspondence. 'Though Mademoiselle de Launay's love for the chevalier appears to have been very sincere, the letters in which it is expressed do not convey the impression of a deep or fervent affection. The style is invariably cold, precise, and elegant, and notwithstanding the occasional tenderness of the sentiments, it is difficult not to think with the Chevalier de Ménil, that the feelings of the writer resided chiefly in her brain. Mademoiselle de Launay proved, however, more constant than the chevalier; for though his passion at first seemed very ardent, it cooled as he became accustomed to the romance of their intercourse. On leaving the Bastile, he proved entirely faithless, and married another.

Whilst love was thus beguiling the tedious hours of Mademoiselle de Launay's captivity, her royal mistress became so heartily weary of confinement, as to make her submission to the regent. She wrote him a letter in which she confessed her guilt, and, as she felt protected by her sex, laid the whole

blame on herself, and completely exonerated her husband. Though she spared her intimate friends, she heartlessly signalised her other accomplices to the regent's notice. Amongst those whom she betrayed were Pompadour, whom she treated with great contempt; Laval, Cellamare, and several of the Breton nobles. This letter, which was read in the regent's assembled council, has remained as an indelible stain on the character of the weak and selfish princess. Though she thus regained her freedom, Madame du Maine was highly indignant to see herself exposed: even whilst reaping the benefit of her treachery, she wished to be spared the shame it so fully deserved. Her husband was liberated about the same time; he feigned great anger at the imprudent conduct of his wife, and refused to see her. Madame du Maine begged of the regent to intercede for her with him; as he was not the dupe of the comedy they were acting, he ironically replied, that her power over her husband must be greater than his: she took this for a compliment, and, springing up from her seat, kissed him on both cheeks in spite of his resistance. Before six months were over, the Duke of Maine had forgiven his wife; they resumed their former mode of existence, and the little court of Sceaux was soon as gay as ever.

The prisoners of inferior rank were more harshly treated: Laval, in particular, who never forgave Madame du Maine. On seeing the conspiracy discovered, the Cardinal of Polignac had sought an interview with the regent, to whom he solemnly protested his innocence. The prince, who only felt contempt for his weak character, merely exiled him to his Abbaye of Anchin, where the disappointed politician resumed the composition of his Latin poem. De Mêsmes wished to adopt a similar course, and assuring Mademoiselle de la Chausseraie that he was entirely guiltless, induced her to procure him a meeting with the regent, over whom she possessed some influence. When the president had repeatedly asserted his innocence, the prince, who had heard him in silence, suddenly shewed him the proofs of his guilt in his own handwriting, and left him with visible indignation. Mademoiselle de la

Chausseraie's intercession alone saved the culprit from the punishment his duplicity deserved.

Although the regent asserted that he had four times more proof than he needed, in order to cause the Duke of Richelieu to be beheaded for high treason, the ambitious young nobleman was not punished with more than a three months' imprisonment in the Bastile. Mademoiselle de Valois obtained his freedom from her father, by consenting to marry the Duke of Modena. Even his captivity proved gratifying to Richelieu's vanity; for, when it was known that the governor had allowed him to walk daily on the bastion of the fortress, ladies of rank deserted the Cours-la-Reine, and thronged in their carriages to the Boulevards, in order to catch a glimpse of the handsome prisoner. The unhappy Bretons suffered most: several of their leaders were publicly executed, while the rest expiated in exile their dream of provincial independence.

Mademoiselle de Launay was liberated several months later than her mistress. This was owing to the honourable reluctance she felt to reveal anything likely to compromise Madame du Maine and her friends. When she was insidiously assured that the duchess authorised her to tell all she knew, she coolly replied, that if captivity had injured Madame du Maine's understanding, it had not produced the same effect upon her; and that, not having been intrusted with any matter of importance, she had nothing to say. It was only on receiving a private message from Madame du Maine, that Mademoiselle de Launay at length consented to disclose a few insignificant circumstances already known to the regent; the more important questions addressed to her she eluded with much prudence and sagacity. As her submission was what the regent chiefly wanted, he soon ordered her to be liberated. Though Madame du Maine had not forgotten her favourite attendant during their long separation, and had even personally interceded with the Duke of Orleans in order to obtain her freedom, she received her with more coldness than might have been anticipated: to judge, at least, from Mademoiselle de Launay's account. "I arrived at Sceaux in the evening;

Madame du Maine was at the promenade. I went to meet her in the garden. She saw me, caused her calèche to stop, and said, 'Ah! there is Mademoiselle de Launay; I am glad to see you.' I approached, she embraced me, and went on." Such was Mademoiselle de Launay's welcome, after a captivity of a year and a half, endured for the sake of her mistress. Notwithstanding this cold and transparent selfishness, the duchess soon restored her confidence, and as much affection as she was capable of feeling, to Mademoiselle de Launay. Her position was no longer that of femme de chambre; and the honourable firmness she had displayed in the cause of Madame du Maine, made her be considered as a personal friend, and drew her universal consideration. At the same time her want of birth and rank still subjected her to so many annoyances and humiliations, that she resolved to marry for the sake of acquiring a position in the world. As the Chevalier de Ménil had proved inconstant, she determined to bestow her hand on M. de Maison-Rouge, who was still devotedly attached to her, and whose noble character she fully appreciated; but he unfortunately died before the project could be fulfilled. Several years after this event, Madame du Maine married her protégée to the Baron of Staal, a Swiss officer in the French service. This marriage, which was strictly one of convenance on either side, proved, however, tolerably happy, and gave Madame de Staal a rank in the household of the duchess.

The political part of Madame de Maine ended with her captivity. However much her ambitious spirit might long for new intrigues, the policy of the regent, in marrying one of his daughters to the Prince of Asturias and betrothing the Infanta to Louis XV., destroyed her last chance of disturbing the kingdom by seeking the aid of Spain. Her power had never rested on a sufficiently broad principle to resist this attack: it was based on narrow court intrigues, and did not even possess the sympathy of those who conspired with her: each had his own private views, which impaired the unity of the plot. Even if it had not been discovered by accident, the Cellamare conspiracy must have proved a

failure: it had none of the elements of success or popularity.

Though the little court of Sceaux continued to be the resort of many celebrated and remarkable individuals, it was never again so brilliant as it had been during the first years of the regency. Disappointed ambition had soured the temper of the duchess, whilst the activity of her mind, wasted on trifles, added to the ennui which marked her life. To destroy the comfort of others, to complain of her melancholy fate, and carry her ennui everywhere with her, seemed henceforth the destiny of the once gay princess. But the world, which had treated her youthful caprices with indulgence, proved more severe as she advanced in life, and partly justified her complaints, by forsaking her. Though these circumstances caused her literary influence to decline, it was more real and more lasting than her political power. If she gave no new impulse to genius, she assisted its development, and had enough taste to feel the superiority of Voltaire, when the envy of his contemporaries proclaimed him inferior to Crebillon. The chief merit of Madame du Maine did not consist, however, in her appreciation of genius, but in having contributed to give a *style* to conversation. The purity, clearness, and elegance which marked her own language, became characteristic of her little court. The delightful memoirs of Madame de Staal are indeed calculated to give a high idea of the wit and talents of the visitors of Sceaux. They are written with singular elegance, and display a tact, judgment, and knowledge of the world, evidently acquired by long intercourse with a polite and refined society.

At the same time it must be confessed that, notwithstanding many points in her character which command esteem, it is difficult to imagine a more cold and unpoetical personage than Madame de Staal. Any feeling like tenderness, enthusiasm, or fervour, was evidently foreign to her nature. It is alleged, that, when Fontenelle asked her if her memoirs were to be very faithful, she replied that she did not intend drawing a full-length portrait of herself, and would only give her

bust to the public. But, though she may have concealed some circumstances of her life, the narrative she has left of it affords a very clear knowledge of her character. The heartless manner in which her marriage was conducted, the candour of her regret not to have married old M. Dacier, when she learns that he died so shortly after the period fixed for their intended union, are such clear indications of selfishness, as would greatly lessen the reader's sympathy, were it not unjust to make Madame de Staal bear the sole blame of the vices of the age and of the world in which she lived.

With all its wit, politeness, and refinement, the little society of Sceaux ever remained cold and heartless. There was no other link between its members than ennui and the desire of amusement: they were acquaintances, not friends. The authors received amongst them belonged, with few exceptions, to that class of writers whose ephemeral compositions seldom outlive the epoch of their birth. The cold brilliancy of style and egotism of the favourite poets of Sceaux, render it hopeless to look for some trace of a high or noble feeling amongst their forgotten productions. Their scepticism itself was too heartless to admit those lofty and generous aspirations, which, with so many faults and errors, nevertheless characterised the philosophy of the eighteenth century. This frivolousness was partly the cause that, though so long in existence, the society of Madame du Maine left few tokens of its being, when it had once been dissolved by the death of the duchess. Its members dispersed, and joined new coteries; but no work of genius, fostered under their care, has remained. Allusions in contemporary records, and the graceful memoirs of Madame de Staal, are the only traces now left of that once brilliant assemblage; which, for splendour and elegance, was then unrivalled, and only wanted women of heart and men of genius.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNTESS OF VERRUE—MADAME DE LAMBERT—STATE OF FRENCH SOCIETY DURING THE REGENCY AND THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING IT—THE NUN TENCIN—MADAME DE PRIE.

"Ci-gît, dans une paix profonde,
La Dame de Volupté,
Qui n'eut plus de sureté,
Qu'Adonis dans ce monde."

SUCH was the epitaph, composed by herself, which the Countess of Verrue, one of the most beautiful and accomplished women of Parisian society, desired to have engraved on her tombstone. and in those four lines lies embodied all the epicurean philosophy of the regency.

The *Dame de Volupté*, as she was now named by her friends, had once been a pure and lovely woman. She belonged to the proud and ancient family of Luynes, and she was early married to the Count of Verrue, who took her to Turin. Her great beauty attracted the attention of Amedée Victor, Duke of Savoy and King of Sicily. She long resisted his addresses, with a constancy and virtue rare for the age in which she lived. The persecution of her husband's relatives, whose protection she implored in vain, and the temptation of ruling over a court where her virtue only excited ridicule, at length proved stronger than her scruples: she became the mistress of the prince. His love was very ardent and sincere: it only increased with years; and it ended by heartily wearying Madame de Verrue. The children she had by her lover, the power she exercised at his court, the wealth she enjoyed, could not fix her affections. She eloped from Turin with her

brother, the Chevalier de Luynes, who assisted her escape. A great quantity of valuable medals disappeared with her from the duke's palace: part were sold in England, to a member of the royal family, and part to Madame, in Paris; where the faithless countess established herself. She led an elegant and luxurious life, suited to her profession of faith. She was rich, prodigal, and spent upwards of a hundred thousand livres a year on curiosities and rare books, which she never read. Her library was, in plays and novels, the most complete a private person had yet possessed. She loved company, when it was, like herself, brilliant, voluptuous, and sceptical. Voltaire admired and flattered her; she contracted a close intimacy with the poet La Faye, whom she often assisted in his compositions. It is said that she never spoke of her former lover, of her children, or expressed the least regret for the step she had taken,—a step which, be it understood, did not spring from principle. Her epitaph was a true index to her character. She was generally considered attractive and agreeable; and was probably as much so as a heartless woman, without love, faith, or purity, can ever be.

Another lady already alluded to, the Marchioness of Lambert, known by some agreeable and sensible productions, also opened her house to the wits of the day. Every Tuesday she received her friends. She was rich, amiable, though no longer young; her table was excellent, and she ranked amongst the few women who never permitted any gambling to take place beneath their roof. La Mothe, Fontenelle, Mairan, Mademoiselle de Launay, and Madame du Maine, were her principal friends. Her influence was quiet, but considerable. She confessed to D'Argenson that she could name whom she liked to the French Academy, and it was known that no member was ever elected without her consent. This bureau d'esprit was one of the first established in the eighteenth century. It took the tone and character of the lady by whom it was presided over, and was, accordingly, more decorous than brilliant. Madame de Lambert being strictly devout, and a close observer of the *convenances*, her society was only an assembly of wits; it had

none of the features of the bureaux d'esprit where the philosophers subsequently held their meetings.

Several other ladies exercised a similar influence. Madame de Lassay, the witty wife of a witty husband, was held in high favour at the court of Madame du Maine; Madame de Simiane, the accomplished grand-daughter of Madame de Sévigné, might, had she only been more wealthy, have taken a place amongst the influential ladies of the day. From Madame de Verrue down to the least important of the women then in repute, there was, however, no circle which could compare with the two great societies of Madame du Maine and the nun Tencin. Madame du Maine is already known to the reader. We shall speak of Madame de Tencin presently.

The coteries over which women presided did not absorb all the social faculties of the Parisian world. Many men, not choosing to submit to female influence, resorted to the two famous cafés of Gradet and Procope; which then enjoyed a grave and learned reputation. There might be seen daily J. B. Rousseau, the unhappy and guilty poet; Boindin, the atheist; the observant and satirical Duclos; Piron, La Mothe, and a host of philosophic authors; amongst whom often appeared the brilliant and universal Voltaire. Their discussions were chiefly bitter attacks, more or less disguised, against society and religion; and though the regent was too careless to persecute them for their opinions, he was often compelled to do so by the prejudices of a world which was intolerant, without having either faith or morality. These philosophic sceptics, the precursors of the encyclopædists, were, however, greatly outnumbered by such epicureans as the Dame de Volupté; who, reckless of the future, only wished to spend the present in luxurious indifference.

This easy scepticism was often united to the grossest credulity: Philip of Orleans seemed to have imparted his own mingled atheism and superstition to the whole nation. The wild fables of the Rosicrucians, with their enthusiastic dreams of elementary spirits, still found eager dupes. Amongst other adventurers, an individual, who took the name of Saint

Maurice, persuaded a large number of wealthy and titled individuals that he could enable them to hold communication with sylphs, gnomes, salamanders, and ondines. The disciples met, on stated days, in a darkened room, where Saint Maurice, acting as high priest, addressed a cabalistic invocation to the genie Alaël. When it was over, he went round the apartment, and received from each individual present a sealed note, containing a request addressed to the spirit. The notes being all collected, Saint Maurice approached the altar, and seemed to cast them into a burning brazier; but the notes he threw in had all been prepared beforehand for the purpose, and he carefully preserved the real ones, in order to frame verbal replies, which he might deliver to his adepts on their next meeting. The credulous dupes took it for granted that, as the answers they received always had some reference to their requests, there really existed an intercourse between Alaël and Saint Maurice. This induced them to grant more readily the demands for large sums, which the omnipotent genie often addressed to them through his high priest. The police put an end to the whole matter, by throwing Saint Maurice into the Bastile.

This feverish thirst for excitement greatly favoured the introduction of Law's financial system. The country was on the eve of a bankruptcy, when the adventurous Scotchman proposed to the regent to supply the deficiencies of the treasury by a paper currency. The Duke of Orleans entered eagerly into this scheme, which had the most astonishing success. A gambling spirit seemed to have suddenly seized on the whole nation: pleasures and intrigues were forgotten in the absorbing pursuit of wealth. The sudden rise of fortunes increased the growing sense of equality. Law himself, as though conscious of his paramount importance, behaved with haughty insolence to the nobles who waited for hours in his antechambers. Birth and rank daily yielded more to wealth. Women entered eagerly into all the intrigues which were then carried on in order to obtain Mississippi shares. Elegant and high-born ladies could be seen standing in the cobbler's stall

of the Rue Quincampoix, waiting with unwearied patience for the favourable moment to approach the shrine of Plutus. The instance of Madame de Boucher, who caused her coachman to upset her before Law's door, thus to obtain the interview he had refused to grant her, was by no means a rare example of the length to which these female stock-jobbers were prepared to go in order to carry their point. Some, faithful to their old system, intrigued to enrich their friends. The Countess of Verrue and the Marchioness of Lassai resolved to make the fortune of the Abbé Terrasson, known for his deep learning and great simplicity. They procured for him about eight or nine hundred thousand *livres* of Law's notes; the abbé having gravely assured them that he could not trust himself with more than a million. In order to prove the excellence of Law's system, he wrote a work upon it, which appeared the very day that the system began to decline. On seeing his fortune lost for the second time in his life, the abbé merely observed, —"Thank Heaven! I am now again out of trouble." This trait of naïveté made Madame de Lassai exclaim, that only a man of much wit could be so foolish.

France did not recover for a long time from the failure of Law's disastrous scheme; and it was only when the excitement caused by it had entirely subsided, that literary productions once more absorbed public attention. The literature of that period is chiefly of a light and frivolous character; for, persons of rank of both sexes being then almost equally idle and averse to heavy works, tales and novels became the vehicle through which the gravest writers were compelled to submit their ideas to the public. Montesquieu frankly confessed that some of his works had been written for frizzled and powdered heads; and in order to insure the success of his admirable satire, "The Persian Letters," he was compelled to give it the form of a novel. From this necessity resulted that singular mixture of philosophy and romance which characterises the productions of the period. The tales of Marivaux, in particular, shew the analytic tendency of the times. Every emotion of the heroine, or secret spring of action, is explained

with tedious exactness; and the most frivolous coquette enters into as detailed an account of her feelings as might be given by any metaphysical Helvetius. The traces of this philosophic spirit are everywhere to be met with; and we find the eloquent Massillon, when addressing the youthful Louis XV. in the chapel of Versailles, reminding him of the election of kings, and of the rights of the people.

But, notwithstanding the efforts of philosophers, the great majority of the society on whom they sought to inculcate their doctrines remained essentially frivolous. During a whole season, nothing was so fashionable, for both men and women, as to cut up costly engravings, and stick the mutilated figures on fans and fire-screens; to make up ribbon knots came next in vogue; the childish game of cup-and-ball was also one of the favourite amusements of this indolent aristocracy. Some noblemen sought to distinguish themselves by the singularity of their conduct. The Duke of Gesvres kept open house during a fit of illness. Forty persons daily sat down at his table; only about twenty of his privileged courtiers, whom he had presented with splendid green suits, were admitted into his presence. They found him in a magnificent apartment, richly dressed in green, reclining on a couch, and making up ribbon knots. Another nobleman, the Duke of Epernon, placed his delight in surgical operations; and, by mingled threats and promises, compelled his unhappy vassals to let him exercise his skill upon them.

Women rendered themselves conspicuous for the eagerness with which they entered into all these frivolous amusements. The celebrated singers, Mademoiselle le Pélissier and Mademoiselle le Maure, divided the court ladies into two rival parties, each of which spared no effort to insure the success of its favourite, by crushing her rival. Amongst the women whose intellect and taste rendered them, however, superior to such trifling occupations, a few were remarkable for the tact and discernment with which they gradually drew around them some of the most eminent men of the day. Of these coteries, for such they were, none was more

agreeable than that presided over by Madame de Tencin, the ex-nun.

This clever, handsome, and unprincipled woman had been compelled by her father to take the veil at an early age, and to enter the convent of the Augustines of Montfleuri. The gay and worldly life led by the inmates of this sacred asylum, which stood at the end of a fashionable promenade in the town of Grenoble, had long been a source of scandal to the faithful. The austere Cardinal le Camus vainly sought to effect a lasting reform: his admonitions were unheeded by the recluses, who daily received a large and brilliant company, consisting of the young and gay of both sexes. The visitors of the convent did not remain long unconscious of the attractions, both mental and personal, of Mademoiselle de Tencin. She was, however, rather fascinating than strictly beautiful; and there was something feline and unpleasant, at first, in her half-closed eyes; but that seeming languor and indolence contrasted so strikingly with the vivacity of her wit, as to add greatly to the irresistible charm of her whole appearance. Her manners were pliant and insinuating; her tact was unerring. She never seemed conscious of her own attractions, but practised the sure flattery of appearing absorbed by whatever others said and did. The fascination which she exercised over the abbess and her confessor procured her unusual freedoms: she was allowed to receive private visits, and to leave the convent, in order to return them, as often as she pleased. But the more she saw of the world, from which she was shut out for ever by her vows, the more her ambitious and intriguing spirit, which already revealed to her the advantages she might derive from her wit and beauty, made her long to enter its forbidden precincts. She adroitly learned from her religious director the steps by which she might regain her freedom. She then protested against her vows, and succeeded in being transferred to the Chapter of Neuville: the obligation of celibacy was the only one under which she still laboured; the freedom enjoyed by the sisters of her order, during the last century, being sufficiently noto-

rious. Some time after this, the young canoness went to Paris to reside with her brother, the Abbé de Tencin. Report said that various scandalous adventures, of which she was the heroine, had compelled her to take this step.

Madame de Tencin, for she henceforth took that name, was soon surrounded by host of admirers; amongst the most assiduous were Bolingbroke, then in France, and Fontenelle. The latter was so thoroughly fascinated, that, though in general little disposed to exert himself in favour of his friends, he procured Madame de Tencin's freedom from the papal court, according to her ardent wish. Being now released from every monastic tie, she became more imprudent in her conduct: she had several notorious intrigues; and, amongst the rest, one with Canon-Destouches, which ended in the birth of a son, who was exposed on the steps of the church of Saint Jean-le-Rond, on the 17th of November 1717. The child, thus forsaken by its heartless mother, was found and brought up by a poor glazier's wife, named Rousseau, and proved to be the future great mathematician, D'Alembert. Though it may be alleged that, residing as she did in the house of her brother, a priest, Madame de Tencin could not recognise her child without ruining all the abbé's future prospects of aggrandisement, she might, however, have provided for it; but the fear of future detection overbalanced every other consideration.

It was about this time that Madame de Tencin began to take an active share in her brother's political intrigues. After vainly trying to influence the regent, she stooped to Dubois, and entered into a degrading connexion with him, which her biographers have vainly sought to excuse by ascribing it to her sisterly affection. Dubois was incapable of loving her, or, indeed, any human being, but he admired her talents; and, at a time when Madame du Maine was enlisting society itself against the regent, he felt the value of Madame de Tencin's influence over the brilliant and select company which assembled at her brother's house. The abbé's easy conscience was also peculiarly acceptable: to him Dubois

intrusted the task of converting Law, when the Scotchman wished to abjure his original creed in order to become minister. De Tencin retired with his proselyte to Melun, in order to avoid the sarcasms of the Parisians: Law was said to have rewarded his complaisance by a large share of paper money. This accusation was strengthened by one of simony, which was proved against the Abbé de Tencin in his own handwriting, at the very moment that he offered to attest his innocence by oath. Though this disgraceful exposure occurred before the parliament of Paris, Dubois had, nevertheless, the effrontery to send the abbé to Rome in order to forward the negotiations relative to his cardinalship. The envoy was worthy of the task. The Abbé de Tencin signalised himself at Rome by his profligate and unprincipled conduct. He opened the letters which Roman prelates imprudently sent to Paris through the French ambassador, and commissioned his sister to seal them up again, and cause them to be delivered to the persons to whom they were addressed. Madame de Tencin was so careless of public opinion, that she communicated to Duclos, the historian, the correspondence between herself and her brother, in which these facts were recorded. When the Abbé de Tencin returned from Rome, he was rewarded with the archbishopric of Embrun: he aimed, however, at the cardinal's hat; but the death of Dubois put an end to his hopes of favour, and threw him and his sister once more into the shade.

In 1723, six months after the death of his corrupt minister, the regent was suddenly carried off by a fit of apoplexy. In the shock and confusion which followed this event, the young king was easily persuaded, by interested counsellors, to name his kinsman, the Duke of Bourbon, prime minister. The passions of this prince were stronger than his judgment; they had rendered him the slave of the Marchioness of Prie, who henceforth governed in his name. This ambitious and violent woman, who was remarkable for her beauty, had first endeavoured to fascinate the regent; but on learning that he allowed his mistresses no political influence, she

directed all her powers of seduction towards the Duke of Bourbon. Her obscure origin affords another proof of the growing influence which had then been already acquired by wealth. Her father, Plenœuf, was a wealthy financier, whom his practical intelligence and unscrupulous conscience had raised from the lowest ranks to considerable affluence. His wife, who was celebrated for her wit, beauty, and intrigues, educated her daughter with great care, and prided herself on her dawning beauty, until she perceived that the young girl aimed at becoming her rival in the little court of adorers with which she was surrounded. The bitter and disgraceful hostility which henceforth existed between the mother and her child compelled M. Plenœuf to marry his daughter to the Marquess of Prie. Though the unnatural rivals were thus separated, their mutual hatred remained unabated.

The insolence and haughtiness of Madame de Prie, when her lover was at the head of affairs, knew no bounds. Her first act was to persecute with vindictive eagerness all the friends of her mother whom it was in her power to injure. Though Voltaire declares that she possessed

> "Un esprit juste, gracieux,
> Solide dans le sérieux,
> Et charmant dans les bagatelles,"

Madame de Prie was evidently incapable of directing the affairs of a kingdom. Her avidity was excessive: she not only received the large pension from England which had been granted to Dubois, but squandered money with the greatest extravagance, and urged her lover to raise the taxes: she directed the committee of finances herself, through the agency of her creatures, the brothers Pâris, whom she had raised to high posts in order to act under their name. Madame de Prie soon felt it was necessary that she should convince her lover of her great talents, so that she might become indispensable to him as minister as well as mistress, the general ambition of the French favourites of the eighteenth century. She adopted the following stratagem, well calculated to fulfil her purpose. Every financial project destined to be submitted to the prince

was first secretly concerted between his mistress and her agents. The compliant financiers purposely left in their written plans many errors, with which they took care to acquaint Madame de Prie. These errors passed undetected by the duke, whose talents were by no means first-rate. Madame de Prie of course discovered and rectified them at once. The brothers Pâris uttered well-feigned exclamations of admiration, recognised the profound judgment of Madame la Marquise, and hastened to adopt her suggestions as the wisest which could possibly have been made. The duke, amazed at the extraordinary intelligence of his clever mistress, congratulated himself on being able to receive her assistance. So great became her power, that, notwithstanding his own personal reluctance, she made him adopt the most exacting and arbitrary measures. Amongst other acts of tyranny attributed to her, is the renewal of the persecution against the Protestants: she had not even the excuse of bigotry for this act of intolerance, being an open and professed atheist. Her power over her lover was so great that, when he wished to marry Mademoiselle de Vermandois, his sister, to the young Louis XV., Madame de Prie, before giving her assent to the marriage, resolved to call in disguise on the princess, who was then in a convent, in order to ascertain whether she was likely to obtain over the king that empire necessary to her views and those of the Duke of Bourbon. She saw her, and was charmed with her wit and beauty, until she unfortunately asked her if she had ever heard of Madame de Prie, and what she thought of her. The reply of the young princess, reared up in conventual austerity, far from a corrupt court, was so candid, that Madame de Prie left the monastery highly incensed, and vowing that Mademoiselle de Vermandois should never be queen of France. But as both she and the Duke of Bourbon were anxious to see the king married, without waiting until the little infanta to whom he was betrothed should be of age, they chose Mary Leczinska, daughter of Stanislaus, the dethroned monarch of Poland, as his wife. Madame de Prie carefully impressed on the mind of the young queen, that to her she

was indebted for her crown; but though the timid Mary Leczinska acknowledged the obligation, she possessed so little influence over her husband that she could not consolidate the power of the marchioness, whose imperious temper soon caused her own ruin and that of her lover. Madame de Prie had long noticed, with secret displeasure, the influence which Fleury, the beloved preceptor of Louis XV., had obtained over his royal pupil; she signalised him to the Duke of Bourbon as a dangerous rival, whom it was absolutely necessary to banish from the king's presence. The duke was so imprudent as to obey this suggestion. On discovering that the Bishop of Fréjus was gone, Louis XV. fell into deep melancholy; but so little was he accustomed to the exercise of power that one of his courtiers, the Duke of Mortemart, was obliged to remind him, on seeing his grief, that he could recall Fleury if he wished. The king eagerly took the hint: Fleury came back from exile, and, prompted by his own personal fears, as well as by a sense of duty, he exposed to his pupil the arbitrary conduct of the Duke of Bourbon and of his mistress: they were immediately sent to different places of exile by order of the king. Madame de Prie bore her misfortune with fortitude, for the space of a week. At the end of that time she sank into a desponding state of mind, and died in 1727; of ennui, according to Voltaire, and of poison administered by herself, according to other accounts. Her brief power left no other traces in France than the hatred and contempt which long remained attached to her name.

Although the regency ends, strictly speaking, with the majority of Louis XV., which occurred before the death of the Duke of Orleans, the extreme youth of the king, and the facility with which he allowed himself to be guided by his counsellors, really prolonged that period for several years. The state of society, moreover, did not undergo any great modification, but remained almost the same under the regency, and the successive ministries of Dubois, the Duke of Orleans, the Duke of Bourbon, and Fleury, Bishop of Fréjus, who succeeded to the latter.

The preceptor of Louis XV. was no sooner in power, than the Archbishop of Embrun and Madame de Tencin, endeavoured to put themselves at the head of the religious party which again persecuted the Jansenists. De Tencin presided over the council of Embrun, which deposed the virtuous Bishop of Senez as guilty of heresy; whilst his sister so signalised herself by her zeal in that capital, that Fleury, who disliked religious discussions, sent her word to leave Paris. She obeyed; but was soon recalled, through the influence of her brother. The suicide of La Frenaye, which preceded this event, had already added new scandal to that associated with her name. This gentleman, who had been one of her favoured lovers, shot himself at her house, in a fit of jealousy or despair. In an incoherent document which he left behind him, he declared her to be the cause of his death. The accusation was taken in a literal sense, and Madame de Tencin was incarcerated in the Bastile. She was, however, soon released; for, though it was evident that she had behaved unjustifiably towards the unhappy La Frenaye, there did not exist the least proof of her supposed guilt.

Neither the scandal caused by this event, nor her total and notorious want of moral sense, seems, however, to have prevented Madame de Tencin from being well received in society. She was a profound dissembler, and those who knew her best could not resist the soothing charm of her manners. The writings with which she amused her old age, and which were published after her death, are calculated to give a high idea of her intellect, as well as of a delicacy and nobleness of mind contradicted by the whole tenor of her life. The close of the tale entitled, "Mémoires de Comminges" is exquisitely beautiful and pathetic; and, in the opinion of many readers, M. Villemain committed no exaggeration when he termed it sublime. The morality of her productions is, at the same time, of a conventional kind, like that of Madame de Genlis's novels: it reminds us of the writer, whose apparent gentleness and utter want of heart partly justified the Abbé Trublet's severe remark, when he once heard her mildness praised,

—"Ay, if she wanted to poison you, she would choose the mildest poison."

Madame de Tencin possessed a deep knowledge of human nature, especially of its evil side; and a keen perception of character, which can explain one source of her power: we easily govern that which we understand. Her observation respecting Fontenelle, that his heart was only a second brain, was singularly true and appropriate. One of her sayings has been repeated since under so many various forms as to deserve quotation:—"Clever people," she remarked, "often commit mistakes from not believing the world to be stupid enough, or as stupid as it is." It was not, however, through the charms of her intellect alone, or by tact and sagacity, that Madame de Tencin drew around her such men as Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Helvetius, and Marivaux. With all her faults, she was capable of friendship, and almost as ready to intrigue for her acquaintances as for her brother and herself. One of the great seductions of her society was, that her wit never took a dictatorial aspect; her finesse itself was admirably veiled by an appearance of quiet simplicity and good sense. Few women understood so well as she did the art of gathering together men of the most varied tastes and opinions; of influencing them without letting them even suspect her power, and of exercising it for the enjoyment of all. However great her other faults might be, in this art she was at least sincere; and the intellectual pleasure she diffused around her was felt by none more keenly than by the clever and intriguing nun Tencin.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE FERRIOL—MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

Amongst the ladies who shared the privilege of presiding over an elegant and chosen society, was Madame de Ferriol, sister of Madame de Tencin; handsome and intriguing like her, but without her wit and suppleness. She was early married to M. de Ferriol, a magistrate, a gourmand, and a Moliniste, who cared little about his wife, and philosophically permitted her to have a long and open liaison with the Maréchal d'Uxelles.

This connexion with a minister added to Madame de Ferriol's power. Her house was frequented by all those who had favours to ask; every class and every party were represented in her society. The roués came there, with the volatile Madame de Parabère, mistress of their patron the regent. Young Madame du Deffand, whose wit and sparkling eyes had already created a sensation at the little court of Madame du Maine, occasionally deserted it for the Parisian circle presided over by the magistrate's wife. Pont-de-Veyle and D'Argental, Madame de Ferriol's two sons, introduced a few of their literary friends: amongst the rest young Arouet, now metamorphosed into Arouet de Voltaire. The presence of Maréchal d'Uxelles, and the relationship of his mistress to Madame de Tencin, attracted the restless exile Bolingbroke. He was generally accompanied by a very handsome, witty, and agreeable widow, named Madame de Villette, whom he afterwards acknowledged as his second wife.

As long as the Maréchal proved constant, his handsome mistress remained in vogue; but his love visibly cooled with age, and with the decline of her charms. Madame de Ferriol

had never been very witty, and she grew ill-tempered and morose with years. The world might have become, like the maréchal, indifferent and estranged, if the attractions she no longer possessed had not fortunately been supplied by the presence of a young and lovely Circassian slave, named Aïssé, whom she had brought up, and who resided beneath her roof.

The history of this unhappy and interesting girl is one of those romantic episodes which never appear to such advantage as when standing forth on the obscurity of a background like the regency. The truth and earnestness of the affection which united the beautiful Circassian and her devoted lover, the Chevalier d'Aydie, contrast so deeply with the heartlessness of the world around them, that posterity, disarmed of its severity, has almost learned to look upon their errors as virtues. The origin of the connexion between Mademoiselle Aïssé and her protectress was singular and romantic.

M. de Ferriol had an elder brother, who travelled a great deal in the East, and was sent on various diplomatic missions to Turkey, where he led a life of oriental despotism and licentiousness. He was in the habit of purchasing beautiful female slaves, two of whom he once brought to France: he kept one for himself, the other he gave to his friend, the Comte de Nogent, who was so deeply enamoured of her that he did not hesitate to make her his wife. M. de Ferriol's slave probably died young, for there is no other record of her fate save that she came to France with her master. In the year 1698, M. de Ferriol was passing through the slave-market at Constantinople, when he was struck with the surpassing loveliness of a young female child exposed for sale. He questioned her owner, and learned that the child had been carried off by the Turks from the palace of a Circassian prince, whom they had massacred with all his people: she was supposed to be his daughter, for her ravishers had found her surrounded by attendants. Moved with compassion at her unhappy fate, and also actuated by a less pure and disinterested motive, the French nobleman purchased the young

Haidée or Aïssé—the two names appear to be identical—for the sum of fifteen hundred livres. On returning to France, he confided the child to his sister-in-law, Madame de Ferriol, and then went back once more to Constantinople, where he resided as ambassador until the year 1711.

Aïssé, as she still continued to be called, although she had been baptized under the name of Charlotte, was kindly treated by Madame de Ferriol, by whom she was brought up on a footing of equality with her two sons. D'Argental and Pont-de-Veyle always loved their adopted sister very tenderly. The beauty of Mademoiselle Aïssé was remarkable, even in that age of beautiful women: it blended the passion and fire of the East with the classical outline of Grecian loveliness, and the animated grace of France. She was about the middle height, of an elegant figure and a graceful carriage; her complexion had, in youth, that dazzling bloom and transparent purity which is still the boast of the fine Circassian races; her eyes, dark, soft, and lustrous, shone with truly Eastern splendour; her oval and delicate countenance expressed the goodness, candour, and finesse of her character.

Aïssé attracted considerable attention in the circle of Madame de Ferriol: her extreme loveliness was not her only charm. If she was neither brilliant nor witty, she possessed, however, all the tact and delicacy of a fine nature: she spoke well, but little, for her disposition was naturally retiring. It is easy to judge of what her conversational powers may have been by the letters she has left. The style in which they are written, though natural and elegant, is frequently careless and incorrect: it has not that precision and purity of idiom which characterise Madame de Staal's language, nor the strength and wit of Madame du Deffand's. The merits of Mademoiselle Aïssé's writings are by no means literary: they spring from the truth and tenderness of her heart, from the natural humility and delicacy of her mind, and from the sincere and honest abhorrence she ever displays against the profligacy and vices of the age. It was this union of rare personal attractions and of the most noble and amiable

qualities of the heart which led a contemporary poet to exclaim—

"Aïssé de la Grèce épuisa la beauté;
Elle a de la France emprunté
Les charmes de l'esprit, de l'air, et du langage.
Pour le cœur je n'y comprends rien;
Dans quel lieu s'est-elle adressée?
Il n'en est plus comme le sien
Depuis l'âge d'or ou l'Astrée."

Aïssé was in all the bloom and freshness of her beauty when M. de Ferriol returned to France. He was on the verge of seventy; his protégée was barely seventeen. He endeavoured, nevertheless, to inspire her with a more tender feeling than gratitude; and when he failed entirely, he asserted his right over her in a tone of oriental despotism. He reminded her that she was his: that he had bought her; and he ended by pleading his love, and offering her a share in all his possessions. In order to escape this persecution, Aïssé appealed to her adopted brother, D'Argental, whose interference and remonstrances at length convinced her ancient admirer of the uselessness of his suit. M. de Ferriol consented to be reasonable, and to receive from Aïssé—all she could give—the affection and devotedness of a daughter. It was in this character that she remained with him until his death. If M. de Ferriol, notwithstanding his years, could not remain insensible to the grace and beauty of the young Circassian, others found the task equally difficult. Bolingbroke did not fall in love with her, probably because he knew that love would be unavailing; but in his letters he alludes, with evident affection and tenderness, to "the dear Circassian," and "the charming Aïssé;" declaring, "that he would sooner have found the secret of pleasing her than the quadrature of the circle."

The regent, who met Mademoiselle Aïssé at the house of his mistress, Madame de Parabère—such was the profligacy of the age, that none of the young girl's protectors objected to her intimacy with this abandoned woman—expressed his admiration in more explicit language. Stung and astonished

with her coldness, which only heightened his passion, he endeavoured to seduce her by the most brilliant offers. Aïssé firmly and indignantly refused; and from that time carefully shunned his presence. Madame de Ferriol learned, with much vexation, the scruples of the young girl, who had certainly not been reared in a very virtuous atmosphere. That she should have refused to become the mistress of her old brother-in-law was perfectly right and justifiable; but that the same reluctance should extend to the first prince of the blood and regent of the kingdom, was not to be conceived. Madame de Ferriol was ambitious; the Maréchal d'Uxelles was deserting her: might not Aïssé prove the stepping-stone to a new and more dazzling fortune than the first? She urged her to yield; she combated her arguments; she called her moral scruples folly; and exhorted her to do as all around her did. Aïssé was young, inexperienced, and pliable by nature. The world in which she had spent her youth was so corrupt that her sense of moral right or wrong was never fully developed. She gradually confessed the truth of Madame de Ferriol's reasoning; but, when her unworthy protectress thought herself assured of the wished-for triumph, another obstacle arose, —the young girl declined to become the mistress of the regent: no longer on moral grounds, but on the plea that she did not, and could never love him. Unlike the noble and freeborn ladies of France, the Circassian slave, bought in the market of Constantinople, inexorably refused to sell herself for gold or power. This time, all the reasoning of Madame de Ferriol could not vanquish the resistance of Aïssé. When the persecution she endured at length became intolerable, the young girl threw herself at the feet of her protectress, conjuring her, in the name of Heaven, to cease mentioning this hateful subject; and declaring, with unexpected vehemence, that if it were urged again she would retire to a convent. Madame de Ferriol, alarmed at a threat which would have deprived her society of its greatest attraction, sullenly desisted from her project, but never forgave Mademoiselle Aïssé this mortifying disappointment.

At the house of Madame du Deffand, already known for her wit, beauty, and equivocal conduct, Aïssé met a Knight of Malta, without either rank or wealth; but whose love she knew not how to resist, like that of the licentious Prince Regent. The Chevalier d'Aydie was young, brave, and handsome: a true hero of romance; with a disposition so loyal and so noble, that even the sceptical Voltaire called him, "Le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche." The young knight no sooner beheld Mademoiselle Aïssé than he became deeply enamoured. She returned his love: there existed only one obstacle to this deep and mutual passion. The parents of the Chevalier d'Aydie, who were as poor as they were noble, had early compelled him to enter the military order of the Knights of Saint John. He had, several years before their first meeting, taken the vows which bound him to lead a life of celibacy. It was then, in the struggle which conscience a while maintained against passion, that all the fatal arguments of Madame de Ferriol recurred to the mind of Aïssé. She yielded to their force; and her protectress, satisfied at the humiliation of a virtue which had been a silent reproach to her own misconduct, openly sanctioned, between her ward and the Chevalier d'Aydie, a connexion which was only treated as a matter of course by the society in which they moved. Repentance and shame entered the soul of Aïssé too late. With the connivance of Madame de Villette, who feigned to take her to England, whilst she left her in a retired quarter of Paris, she gave birth to a daughter, unsuspected. Her child was afterwards placed in a provincial convent, where she passed under the name of Miss Black, niece of Lord Bolingbroke. But though appearances, which were still of paramount importance in that corrupt world, were thus saved, the sense of shame and degradation never left Mademoiselle Aïssé's mind, naturally too pure and delicate for the errors into which her unhappy education had made her fall.

The birth of their child only increased the passion of the Chevalier d'Aydie. He had already offered his mistress to procure a dispensation from the Pope, and marry her, but

she had steadily refused: her unknown origin, the poverty of her lover, and the prejudices of the age, which would have rendered such an alliance degrading for him, made her persist in her refusal, even when she became a mother. In the excess of his passion, the chevalier vainly entreated Aïssé to fly with him to the solitude of some remote land, where they might live in peace and happiness: she firmly declined. At this distance of time it is difficult to understand and appreciate her scruples: they were probably strengthened by the destiny of the Comte de Nogent, who, having imprudently married the beautiful slave, brought, like her, from Constantinople by M. de Ferriol, had, in consequence, been subjected to the most bitter insults. The dread of entailing a similar fate on her lover made Mademoiselle Aïssé disinterestedly sacrifice her own hopes of felicity to his honour. "However much happiness it might be for me to become his wife," she mournfully wrote to her friend Madame Calandrini, "I must love the chevalier for himself. What would the world say, if he married an unknown dependant on the family of Ferriol? I value his honour too highly, and I am too proud to let him commit this folly. Would the chevalier always think as he does now? He might repent; and then, indeed, I should die of grief at the thought of having caused his unhappiness,—at the thought, more bitter still, of being no longer loved."

Madame Calandrini, whom she thus addressed, was a lady of much piety and virtue, residing at Geneva, and who had endeavoured to awaken Aïssé to a sense of her error. She succeeded; for the young girl's soul was naturally pure and good. But the affection she had conceived for the chevalier was no transient love: the struggle between passion and duty was long and full of bitterness. The ill-temper of Madame de Ferriol, to whose house she returned after the death of the old ambassador, added to Aïssé's sorrow. No duty, no obedience, however entire, could please the woman whom, notwithstanding all her faults, Aïssé considered as the benefactress of her youth. Stolen visits to the convent where her child was brought up, and the affection of the chevalier, would

have consoled her, if she could have indulged in that affection without the sense of sin. Though oppressed with remorse, she strove against her feelings in vain. "Alas!" as she again wrote to Madame Calandrini, "I have not the courage of being courageous. Reason, your counsel, and Divine grace itself, are not so strong as my passion." And she ingenously strove to justify that passion to her friend and to her own heart. "The chevalier loved her so tenderly, that it would be ingratitude not to return his love. Was she not bound to do so for the sake of their child?"

Madame Calandrini pitied her friend, consoled her, but continued her exhortations. Aïssé admitted their truth, but delayed the dreaded period which should place an eternal bar between her and the man she loved. "Perhaps," she sadly and humbly observed—hoping, when hope there was none—"God will, after all, have mercy on us. Alas! I have hard struggles to go through. I have had them all my life. I reproach myself—ah! why were you not Madame de Ferriol? You would have taught me to love virtue. . . . I knew you much too late. You alone developed my soul: it was destined to be virtuous."

"I am always remembering," she observed on another occasion, "the conversation we had in your room. I make efforts which kill me. . . . Happy are those whose virtue enables them to triumph over a similar weakness! To break through the bonds of a most violent passion, of a most tender and justifiable friendship, such is my fate. It is terrible. Can death be worse? and yet you wish me to do it. I will; but I doubt that I can survive it. I fear to return to Paris: I fear whatever brings me nearer to the chevalier, and I am unhappy to be far from him. I know not what I wish. Oh, why," she despairingly adds,—"why may not my passion be permitted? why is it not innocent?"

When Mademoiselle Aïssé wrote this, she had already been attached to the Chevalier d'Aydie for several years; but time, instead of weakening, had strengthened their affection. Its depth and sincerity rendered her struggle very bitter. Her

health soon sank under the weight of her sorrow, which was increased by the despair the chevalier felt when he thought himself on the point of losing her. "Every one," she wrote, when she had partly recovered, "pitied him. Indeed, madame, you would have wept as I did. He had a mortal fear lest I should die. His grief and sadness were so great, that I had to console him, and to conceal my sufferings from him as much as I could. His eyes were always filled with tears. I did not dare to look at him. Madame de Ferriol asked me one day if I had bewitched him? I answered, the charm which I used was to love against my own will, and to render his life as happy as I could."

It was the bond of an affection so true, so tender, and so constant, which Aïssé had now to sever. She accomplished her task mournfully, but without weakness. The Chevalier d'Aydie had been well aware of Madame Calandrini's efforts to reclaim his mistress. He never sought to oppose that lady's influence, but in the most touching terms he besought Aïssé not to deprive him of her love. He renewed his offer of marriage, which she again declined. The dread of alienating him for ever made her long delay her resolve; but that fear at length yielded to conscience, and she accordingly announced to the Chevalier d'Aydie, that friendship must henceforth be the only feeling between them. Her sorrow was too evident, and he loved her too well, to indulge in useless remonstrances or reproaches. He submitted to her decision, not without grief, but resignedly; protesting that her affection, whatever name she might give it, would ever be his only source of happiness, and promising never to seek to influence her against the dictates of her conscience. He religiously kept his word; and, though years of mingled sorrow and remorse had faded the numberless charms which had first enchanted him, his love for his Circassian mistress ever remained fervent and true. In the sincerity of that affection, he made her the whimsical proposal that, when their years were such as to justify such a course, without giving rise to scandal, they should both reside under the same roof, and spend the end

of their life together; thus realising in their old age the unavailing dream and longing of their youth. Mademoiselle Aïssé smiled and wept as she heard him; for she knew she would never live to see even that second dream fulfilled.

She ardently desired to consecrate her penitence by confessing her sins to a priest; but Madame de Ferriol would not probably have sanctioned such a step, and Aïssé was now too weak to go even to the neighbouring church. A plot to enable her to carry her desire into effect was accordingly concerted between the chevalier, Madame du Deffand, and Madame de Parabère. The latter lady called on her friend, and took her in her carriage to the house of Madame du Deffand, where a clergyman had been brought by the Chevalier d'Aydie. This solemn reconciliation of her soul to God, gave Aïssé a peace of mind she had never known till then. The weary strife was over, the bitter cup was quaffed, and she felt spiritually strengthened and purified by its wholesome bitterness. Her conscience was at rest; the chevalier loved her still; she might love him without feeling burdened by the sense of sin or shame. But this happiness—for happiness it would have been—came too late. The strength of life and youth had been spent in the long struggle against passion. Signs she could not mistake soon told Aïssé that her life was drawing to a close.

She had suffered too much not to feel resigned; but she scarcely dared to contemplate the chevalier's grief. As though he could by his gifts have hoped to win back the life of a being so beloved, he was constantly heaping presents on every one around her. But love availed not against death, and each day brought Aïssé nearer to the term of her existence. A few days before her end, she thus addressed Madame Calandrini, for the last time: "The life I have led has been very wretched. Have I ever had an instant's joy? I could never be with myself. I dreaded to think. Remorse never abandoned me from the time that I opened my eyes to the extent of my errors. Why, then, should I dread the separation of my soul, since I feel convinced that God is all good-

[illegible]

[illegible] Madame de [illegible] to succeed [illegible] should take [illegible] her friend, agreed to prevent

them from meeting until the lady should have made a new choice.

The indulgence which Aïssé displayed towards Madame de Parabère did not extend to Madame de Tencin. Between these two women—one frail and erring, but still so candid and noble-minded; the other heartless, corrupt, and a profound dissembler—there always existed a strong feeling of repulsion. Mademoiselle Aïssé pitied Madame de Parabère, whilst she reproved her vices: the weakness of her character and intellect partly excused her; but there was something in the mixture of great talents and total want of principle, characteristic of Madame de Tencin, which was, and justly so, more repugnant to her moral sense than mere profligacy. Though she could not avoid mingling with those whose vices she condemned, habit never mitigated Mademoiselle Aïssé's indignation against the corruption of the age: she expressed it all in her correspondence, with singular force and energy. On one occasion, when her pen refused to trace some new deed of infamy, she prophetically exclaimed: "Everything that happens in this monarchy announces its coming destruction."

Had her own example always sanctioned her principles, Mademoiselle Aïssé might have possessed a power far more extensive and beneficial than that which she owned: and yet, so corrupt was the age, her scruples and sincere penitence were neither much admired nor understood. The deep sorrow she felt for the errors of her youth only excited a feeling very akin to ridicule in the mind of Voltaire, when he read her correspondence many years after her death. That sorrow has purified and exalted her memory in the judgment of posterity.

The part which the Circassian Aïssé acted in the history of her times is not perhaps very striking or important. But those whose task it is to dwell on the state of French society during the regency, will ever find it difficult to forbear introducing a figure so touching and so pure, amidst the shameless licence which must form the subject of their whole picture.

PERIOD THE SECOND.

REIGN OF LOUIS XV.

CHAPTER I.

RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE REGENCY—THE FIRST BUREAUX D'ESPRIT—MADAME DE LA POPELINIÈRE—MADAME DE TENCIN.

THE regency can only be viewed as one of those transitory periods which seemed destined to mark in history the passage, otherwise too sudden and violent, from one epoch to another.

If we consider the reign of Louis XIV. and that of his successor,—a stern but still majestic tyranny, on the one hand, and a weak, profligate despotism on the other,—it is evident that the arbitrary power, once so strong and so respected, could not have fallen immediately, and without preparation, into the contempt and abhorrence which foretold its approaching ruin. Even as the human mind seldom passes at once from implicit belief to total scepticism, so that aggregate of human minds called a nation requires an intervening period before it wholly renounces the gods whom its fathers have worshipped. The sway of the regent acted as the necessary transition between a respected though hollow power, and one which, whilst it proved more hollow still, was not entitled even to the shadow of respect.

The secret corruption which undermined society during the long reign of Louis XIV. broke forth openly at the death of the aged monarch. The nation, on suddenly finding itself free, after years of gloomy restraint, plunged headlong into the most sensual excesses. None paused to examine what they should reject or admit: licence was the step which led from insincere devotion to professed scepticism. During the regent's sway, all faith in religious and political institutions

seemed to perish; materialism in its grossest form became the prevailing feeling of the nation: a feeling which the succeeding philosophers partly adopted and partly purified, before openly making it the creed of France. It is this difference between the mere indistinct feeling and the fully-defined creed which draws so wide a distinction between the regency and the reign of Louis XV. The corruption which was recklessly practised at one period as a defiance against the memory of Louis XIV., was systematically adopted and justified during the following reign; and, by destroying the remaining vestiges of the Middle Ages, it tended to aid the cause of scepticism. It was thus that France passed from that austere though decaying faith which characterised the seventeenth century, to the corroding and licentious incredulity of the eighteenth.

If we take this retrospective view of the regency, it is because that period was succeeded by a few years of repose and comparative decency, which might have led an unreflecting mind to conjecture that these previous saturnalia of a falling power could pass and leave no trace behind. The youth of the king, the purity of his early life, and the cautious moderation of the prime minister, Cardinal Fleury, caused a temporary reaction calculated to favour this belief. It was, however, precisely during this period that philosophy acquired the power which was to prove so formidable. As yet, it was scarcely feared or understood: it only embodied the opinions of a few individuals; it had not become the creed of the nation.

The free development of philosophy was greatly favoured by the personal characters of Fleury and the young king; for both, though through different motives, forbore to interfere with the professors of the new doctrines. The ambitious vanity of Louis XIV., as well as his natural tastes, had led him, in the spirit of his contemporaries, to identify himself with almost every remarkable movement which took place. It was thus that he controlled literature by becoming its patron, and completely ruled French society. The indolent and apathetic Louis XV., on the contrary, gave up the political power to his ministers and mistresses, and abandoned to women and

literary men that social influence which an unerring instinct had induced his predecessor to secure. The name of Louis XIV. is connected with every event of his reign; that of his descendant might almost be omitted in the history of the eighteenth century. In this indifference of Louis XV. to the personal exercise of power originated a wide separation between the court and French society, unknown until his reign.

Hitherto the monarch had been the great arbiter of public opinion. He might be influenced, but the influence was at least exercised in his name. The court ruled everything, from state matters to the success of a new play. What the court praised was inevitably admired in Paris. Such at least had been the case during the long reign of Louis XIV. The little heed Louis XV. took of anything not concerning his pleasures, and the timid scruples of Fleury—both so much opposed to the ardent and progressive spirit of the age—first created a feeling of independence in Parisian society. This feeling soon became one of antagonism, at first scarcely concealed, and openly declared in the end. The court long affected to contemn the new power which had thus sprung up into existence; and vainly attempted to supersede it when it had, in time, become the organ of the age. The attempt was, from its nature, doomed to fail; and, after a brief struggle, Versailles bowed before the decrees of a world from which it had, until then, held aloof with contempt.

It need scarcely be mentioned that this new power was under the sole and immediate control of women. Whilst men of talent were neglected by the court, the clever ladies of Parisian society received them in their saloons. It was the women who complied with the demands of the age, which neither Fleury nor Louis XV. understood. The cardinal feared and disliked light literature, which he considered of a dangerous tendency; the king was wholly indifferent to it. A few women seized on that important power: they gave evening and dinner parties, and soon drew together the great men of the day. When it was found that they could raise men to reputation and to social power more securely than

ministers or favourites, their court superseded that of royalty. Thus it was that women were among the first who paved the way to those great changes in the religious and political state of the nation which occurred towards the close of the century.

During the earlier portion of Louis XV.'s reign, the philosophic power developed itself slowly, but not wholly unperceived. Already every literary production, history, play, tragedy, or romance, introduced those significant declamations against fanaticism and the priesthood, which, at a later period, were directed against religion itself. It was natural and inevitable, under an absolute government, that books should be rendered an organ of public opinion. Though the laws granted no institutions, literature was invested with all the force of one by the general and tacit consent of society. Had Fleury been a man of daring and commanding mind, he might easily have conciliated the philosophic party, and softened, if not subdued, the vehemence of their attacks on religion. But, though aware of their dangerous influence, the cardinal would neither conciliate them by protection nor irritate them by persecution. He never ventured beyond a timid repression, which they scarcely heeded.

This medium course was that which the prudent and cautious priest adopted in governing France. By merely allowing the country to recover in peace and quietness from the disasters inflicted by the ambition of Louis XIV., he effected much good. But even whilst he made peace and economy the basis of his government, Cardinal Fleury was well aware of numberless evils, in which, though he felt his utter powerlessness to remove them, he partly foresaw the approaching ruin of the state. The accumulated miseries of centuries lay beyond his reach; they required no less than the vigorous and personal interference of the nation: in other words, a revolution. This Fleury felt; and, with the gloom natural to old age, he considered this dissolution of the existing order of things as the end of the world: the increasing spirit of irreligion confirmed him in this belief. With a strange infatuation, the cardinal, however, persisted in his conduct towards that power of which

he perceived the gradual and fatal advances. Without venturing on serious opposition, he rigidly refused to allow the philosophers any other influence than that social one of which they were already possessed; either undervaluing this influence, or feeling his own inability to repress it. When the young and libertine Abbé de Bernis—la bouquetière du Parnasse, as his frivolous talent for versifying had made him be called—asked the old cardinal for a living, Fleury peremptorily refused. "You shall never," he observed, "obtain a living whilst I live." "I shall wait, then," was the prompt and audacious reply. And a few years later Cardinal Bernis governed France with Madame de Pompadour.

It has been observed, and with great truth, that the philosophers were treated too much like the young abbé. As long as the cardinal lived, they could do little outwardly; but, like the abbé, the whole body bided their time, inwardly exclaiming, "We shall wait;" and like him, too, when the old cardinal was in his grave, they governed France—as they had longed to govern her—by the power of ideas.

Thus, favoured by the indifference of the monarch and the timidity of his ministers, philosophic literature developed itself freely. We have used the term "philosophic literature," because literature, which in France had been learned and religious during the sixteenth century, poetical and brilliant in the seventeenth, became almost exclusively philosophic in the eighteenth century. Never, indeed, was there an age less fitted for faith or poetry: the deep and withering corruption of the regency seemed to have destroyed the very root of these faculties in man. To know and study himself—not, however, in an elevated point of view—became his greatest intellectual want. Abstract reasoning superseded feeling and imagination: a cold analytic tendency is remarkable in the earliest productions of this period. But however heartless the action of intellect may have then been, it was full of life and energy. After the grossness and licence of the regency, a reaction took place in the feelings of the nation, and there arose a universal wish for intellectual excitement.

Two women, Madame de la Popelinière and Madame de Tencin, represented the various aspects of this new feature in the tastes of the nation: Madame du Maine and the courtly beaux-esprits of Sceaux were already left far behind. Men of the world, who to their general licentiousness united a voluptuous taste for the fine arts, mingled with singers, musicians, painters, and poets, in the drawing-room of the graceful Madame de la Popelinière. This lady, herself the daughter of an actress, and the wife of one of the wealthiest farmers-general of the day, was admirably adapted to connect the degenerate scions of a reckless nobility with the men who administered to their pleasures. She helped to found the loose and degraded school of art which had already superseded the stately magnificence introduced under Louis XIV., and which was afterwards brought to its highest point by the patronage of Madame de Pompadour. M. de la Popelinière was one of those opulent financiers whose intercourse and alliances with the nobility had enabled them to acquire all the external polish of the upper ranks of society. The growing importance of this class was a revolution in the manners of the nation, which foreboded one in the form of their government. M. de la Popelinière's ostentatious patronage of artists had won for him the title of the French Mecænas. Rameau, the composer; Vaucanson, the mechanician; Vanloo, the painter; his lovely wife, who introduced Italian singing into France; Lany, the dancer, with poets like the rosy Abbé de Bernis or the heavy Bernard, (so inappropriately named "le gentil,") represented art and poetry at the house of the rich financier.

Madame de la Popelinière was far superior to her husband. Her mother, Mademoiselle Daucour, had educated her for the stage, on which she would probably have figured with much applause, if M. de la Popelinière, fascinated by her beauty and elegant wit, had not made her his mistress. Mademoiselle Daucour represented herself to Madame de Tencin as having been seduced by her lover; and so interested her protectress in her behalf, that she mentioned her case to the prime minister. The act of openly keeping a mistress was a luxury

as yet scarcely authorised among the bourgeoisie: vice was still considered the privilege of the noble and the great. Fleury exacted that M. de la Popelinière should marry Mademoiselle Daucour; threatening, in case of refusal, to withdraw the lease which he held from the king as farmer-general. M. de la Popelinière complied; but he never forgave his mistress the means she had taken to secure the rank of his wife.

Madame de la Popelinière soon became one of the most admired women of the Parisian world. She adapted herself to her new position with singular ease and tact, and did the honours of her husband's house with the utmost grace and affability. Her wit and taste became celebrated; the latter quality was especially displayed in the judgments she passed on all the works of art or literature submitted to her: she was soon thought infallible in such matters. An appeal against any of her decisions was, until J. B. Rousseau came, a thing almost unheard of. Marmontel, an excellent judge on these subjects, and by no means prejudiced in her favour, speaks of her talents as a critic with the highest praise. "Madame de la Popelinière," he observes, in his Memoirs, "paid me some attention. She wished me to read 'Aristomène' to her; and of all the critics I had consulted she was, in my opinion, the best. After hearing my tragedy, she analyzed it with singular clearness and precision; retraced the course of the action, scene by scene; remarked the passages which she had found beautiful, as well as those she thought feeble; whilst all the corrections she proposed struck me as so many rays of light. A perception so lively, so rapid, and yet so just, astonished the whole company; and, though at this reading I received abundant applause, I must say that her success eclipsed mine."

The successes of Madame de la Popelinière were short lived. She engaged, through mere vanity, in an intrigue with Richelieu, which her husband discovered. He made her a handsome allowance, but would no longer allow her to reside under his roof. Madame de la Popelinière was thus excluded for ever from that elegant society over which she had ruled

with so much grace: for the Parisian world adopted the Spartan maxim of punishing, not those who sinned, but those who did not sin cleverly enough. A painful illness cut her off in the flower of her age: grief and ennui aggravated her sufferings: the Duke of Richelieu, however, paid her great attention until her death, and was lauded to the skies for this heroic constancy.

Whilst Madame de la Popelinière represented the artistic tendencies of society, the more strictly intellectual portion—the men of science and daring thought—gathered around Madame de Tencin; that *queen of beaux-esprits*, as she was then called. After acting the part of a profligate intrigante under the regency, Madame de Tencin, under the ministry of Fleury, seemingly gave up her intrigues, and was satisfied with keeping one of the earliest and most celebrated bureaux d'esprits of the eighteenth century. Fleury, who feared and disliked her, did not venture to oppose this branch of her power: he even submitted to her influence more than he imagined; for, whilst he often yielded to the advice of his old friend, Madame de Carignan, this lady was wholly under the guidance of Madame de Tencin. Not satisfied with this influence, the ex-nun wished to govern through her brother. Her intrigues procured him the highest dignities of the Church, but failed in raising him to the rank of minister. This want of success in her most ardent wish made her give more time and attention than she might otherwise have granted to her literary society. We have already alluded to it in the preceding pages, but its most brilliant epoch was certainly during the ministry of Fleury. This little coterie, more truly select and intellectual than any of those by which it was succeeded, has been described with much liveliness by Marmontel: "I there saw assembled, Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Mairan, Marivaux, the young Helvetius, Astruc, and others, all literary or scientific men; and in the midst of them a woman of singular talents and profound judgment, but who, with her plain and simple exterior, had more the look of the housekeeper than of the mistress. This was Madame de Tencin. I

soon perceived that each guest came there ready to act his part, and that the wish of shining often prevented conversation from following an easy and natural course. Every one seemed anxious to seize, as quickly as possible, and as it flew by, the opportune moment of uttering his bon-mot and his anecdote, —of ushering his maxim or his trail of light and brilliant wit; and this necessary à propos was often rather far-fetched. In Marivaux the impatient wish of displaying his sagacity and finesse was visibly manifested. Montesquieu waited with more calmness until the ball should come to him, but he waited for it nevertheless; Mairan watched for the favourable opportunity; Astruc disdained to wait; Fontenelle alone let it come to him without seeking for it, and he made so discreet a use of the attention with which he was heard, that his ingenious remarks and charming stories never occupied more than a moment; Helvetius, attentive and discreet, listened and collected for the future."

Such was, no doubt, the external aspect of Madame de Tencin's society; but there was more in it than met the eye of so superficial an observer as Marmontel. Under the superintendence of a cold, worldly woman, the germ of the future encyclopædists was being slowly but surely developed. A mind so keen, so clear-sighted, so deeply versed in the details of political machinery, as was that of Madame de Tencin, could not but be annoyed and disgusted at the disorder of everything in the state. Disappointed ambition converted this feeling into one of secret but dangerous opposition. She found no difficulty in imparting her own sentiments of discontent to her friends. The actual circumstances of the country favoured the growth of such feelings; nor was Madame de Tencin unfitted to receive the first outpourings of the covert indignation which the condition of France was then beginning to inspire. As she advanced in age her conduct naturally became more correct than it had been hitherto; she could not command esteem, but her tact and address enabled her to secure the outward respect of those who approached her: she asked no more. Those who esteemed her least

could not be indifferent to her, and the attractions of her mind and conversation procured her more admirers than she had formerly obtained by the charms of her person: she even numbered amongst her friends Pope Benedict XIV., who, as Cardinal Lambertini, had frequented the literary circle at her house. When he was raised to the pontifical chair he sent her his portrait in token of remembrance, and carried on a close correspondence with her. The immorality of Madame de Tencin was, moreover, no disqualification for becoming the advocate of enlightened freedom. It was a characteristic feature of the eighteenth century, that all those who prepared the great but short-lived triumph of liberty with which it closed, participated, from Madame de Tencin down to Mirabeau, in the immorality of the age. Freedom sprang not, as in Rome or in early Greece, from a primitive purity of morals, but from the very corruption of preceding tyranny. It was an intellectual movement, and all joined in it; not so much for the reason that the existing state of things was corrupt or impure, as because all felt that it was worn out, and doomed to perish. This was especially the case with the early philosophers; the school of Rousseau adopted a more exalted and sentimental tone: all had the same end in view—destruction.

Madame de Tencin was one of the first women who laid the basis of this formidable power. The nature of her influence over her contemporaries may be traced in two important works, which, if they do not owe their existence to her, were at least inspired by the tone prevailing in her circle. We allude to Montesquieu's "Esprit des Lois," to the success of which Madame de Tencin greatly contributed, and to Helvetius's "De l'Esprit;" not published, indeed, until after her death, but imbued with the doctrines which both she and her friends professed. Thus the first attack on absolute monarchy in favour of constitutional freedom, and the first display of that gross materialism which characterised the eighteenth century, both originated in the drawing-room of Madame de Tencin.

In the present altered state of society, it may appear

strange to see a clever and unprincipled woman acting so important a part. But we have already shewn that the absence of political rights rendered this interference of women unavoidable. Madame de Tencin was well aware of the power of her sex. Her advice to Marmontel on his conduct in the world, was, above all things, to secure the friendship of women. It is, indeed, certain that without their aid nothing could have been done in France for freedom. A strong proof of this is afforded by the fate of a political and literary club—known as the club de l'Entresol—which was founded in Paris in the year 1724. Bolingbroke, then an exile in France, induced a few of his friends, at the head of whom was the Abbé Alary, to form a society, and meet occasionally in order to discuss the political questions of the day. They met in the entresol of President Hénault's hotel, whence they derived their name. As they were personally acquainted with one another, they had no fear of being betrayed. All the abuses in the state, and every interesting political question of the moment, were noticed by them, and duly commented upon. The philanthropic but visionary Abbé de Saint-Pierre here read his projects for perpetual peace, and discussed how dukes and peers might be rendered useful to the state: a difficult question to solve. Many high and eminent men joined the meetings of this society. The nobles were far from being averse to the constitutional system of England, which, whilst it secured the liberty of the poorer classes, granted preponderating power and influence to the aristocracy, by whom it had been established.

Fleury saw a germ of opposition in the existence of this political club, and, after tolerating it for several years, he caused it to be quietly suppressed. It was useless for the members to resist: no law secured the right of meeting in order to criticise the acts of government; and, as they were neither thrown into the Bastile, nor otherwise persecuted, they had, according to the existing state of things, little reason to complain. They had failed, moreover, in enlisting the women in their cause: many of Bolingbroke's disciples affected to

despise what they called drawing-room reputations; and, seduced by the brilliant and versatile talents of the English nobleman, aimed at becoming, like him, statesmen and orators. They forgot that, if they were ready with their parts, the stage was still wanting.

The women took the greatest vengeance in their power on this encroachment on their privileges: they never spoke of the club de l'Entresol whilst it existed, and they raised no voice in its favour when it was dissolved. The result of this was that the suppression was scarcely heeded, and was immediately forgotten. Would Fleury, would any other minister, have dared to control the soirées of Madame de la Popelinière or of Madame de Tencin? far more destructive, however, and dangerous to the state than the pacific and social theories of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre; for if they did not outstrip him in their views, they avoided clothing them in the ridiculous form which caused the good abbé to be both contemned and tolerated. Everything that sprang from these assemblies was clear and tangible; there was an end in view, and the strides made towards that end were both straightforward and swift. The members of the club de l'Entresol were dispersed as soon as they ventured to express their opinions beyond their own narrow circle. Under the presidency of a fashionable woman they might have spoken fearlessly. It was this that constituted the great social influence of woman. Every day this power acquired a greater impetus; for every one began to see that, in order to be celebrated and admired, it was not needful to be either presented at Versailles or patronised by a minister. A few words of elegant praise from Madame de la Popelinière, a quiet remark of Madame de Tencin's, were enough to insure this result in the higher classes. Around these fair planets moved innumerable stars which received their light from them, and diffused it in their turn to the inferior circles over which they presided. Thus the same spirit was spread throughout the whole of society.

And whilst matters were going on thus, whilst women and

literary men were wielding that formidable power called opinion—and which, let governments change as they will, still rules the world—what did the court, the ministers, or the king do, if not to win it over, at least to control it? The answer is the history of France at that period—they did nothing!

CHAPTER II.

THE COURT — LOUIS XV. — HIS MISTRESSES — MADAME DE MAILLY—MADAME DE VINTIMILLE—MADAME DE CHATEAUROUX.

WHILST Madame de la Popelinière and Madame de Tencin represent and govern the élite of French society, types of the corruption of the nobility, of the folly and insolence of princely rank, and of the weakness of falling monarchy, may be found in the Duke of Richelieu, the Count of Charolais, and the young and indolent Louis XV.

The versatile Richelieu, formerly Duke of Fronsac, is eminently fitted to stand forth as the grand seigneur of the eighteenth century: brave, handsome, profligate, and witty, the darling pet of the austere Madame de Maintenon, the favourite of all the handsome women of this time, from the royal princess down to the grisette, he distinguished himself through three generations, by gallantries, diplomatic intrigues, and occasional successes in war. Profligate even in his old age, he died on the eve of the great convulsions of French society: reckless of the past, indifferent to the future, and bequeathing the aristocratic corruption he had fomented to the fierce vengeance of the French Revolution.

The aristocracy were, under Fleury, what they had been under the regency of the Duke of Orleans,—reckless and corrupt. They still kept aloof from the literary circles, but began to receive and visit the financiers; whose daughters brought wealth and mésalliance into more than one ancient house. With the exception of a few nobles who frequented Madame de la Popelinière's circle, the great majority were indifferent to the arts which they vainly affected to patronise.

The Maréchal d'Estrées, who possessed one of the finest collections of antiques in France, never knew the value of the treasures he spent vast sums to accumulate. Having once heard that a bust of Alexander, said to be by Praxiteles, had been bought at a sale a few years before, by an unknown Parisian amateur, he commissioned one of his agents to discover and purchase it, if possible. After long researches, the bust was found in his own gallery, where it lay forgotten and covered with dust. Such was the enlightened patronage extended toward the arts by the French nobility.

This haughty indifference to elegant pursuits was not redeemed by the rigid virtues with which it has been sometimes accompanied. The nobles, who disdained to lower themselves to the level of poets and artists, yet turned their old ancestral mansions into gambling-houses. The young Horace Walpole thus alludes to the subject, in one of the letters written during his first continental tour:—"It is no dishonour to keep public gaming-houses: there are at least a hundred and fifty people of the first quality in Paris who live by it. You may go into their houses at all hours of the night, and find hazard, faro, &c. The men who keep the hazard table at the Duke of Gesvres' pay him twelve guineas each night for the privilege. Even the princesses of the blood are dirty enough to have shares in the banks kept at their houses. We have seen two or three of them; but they are not young, nor remarkable, but for wearing their red of a deeper dye than other women: though all use it extravagantly." The prejudices of the Middle Ages remained, but the deep sense of chivalrous honour belonging to those times had wholly vanished.

To all the vices of the nobility, the princes of the blood added a singular amount of folly, insolence, and cruelty. The Duke of Orleans, son of the regent, a learned and austere Jansenist, distinguished himself by extraordinary whims. It was his settled belief that the laws of nature had become suspended, and that neither births nor deaths any longer occurred. Until the birth of the Dauphin, this learned madman was the heir-

presumptive to the throne. The insanity of the degenerated Condés took a more dangerous form. The most harmless of them was subject to fits, during which he barked like a dog; the princes of Cont became notorious for their revolting and atrocious actions; the Count of Charolais *amused* himself with shooting down tilers from the roofs of the houses; for the consequences of which princely amusement he was three times pardoned by the king.

Mingled fear and hatred was the only feeling the people entertained for the nobles and the princes; but the faith in royalty still lived, strong and deep, in their hearts. Before the revolution of 1789, the attachment of the French to their sovereign was proverbial: nor was it unfounded. Ever since Louis VI., the monarchs of France had endeavoured to raise the condition of the commons, and to lower the pride of the nobility. The people naturally felt grateful to the king, who thus delivered them from the oppression of their local tyrants. He soon became in their eyes the source of all law and all justice; it was this that invested him with a sacred character. As long as the nobles had the greatest share of power, no doubt was thrown on the infallibility of royalty; but when the nobles were completely subdued—when the monarch and his people stood face to face—then the latter, all their illusions being dispelled, broke the idol they had worshipped so long. The absolute power of royalty thus led to its fall.

The affection of the French for their monarchs survived, however, the good they had derived from them. Oppressed and degraded as the people were in the early part of the eighteenth century, they still idolised their young sovereign. The lonely and unprotected state of the descendant of so many kings, the dangers to which he was thought to be exposed, his beauty, and tender years, all contributed to render him dear to the nation. It was fondly believed that, as soon as the king should have begun to govern for himself, every evil would be remedied. This hope was evidently exaggerated: no monarch could have accomplished a task so

mighty; but there is no doubt that Louis XV., had he been sufficiently earnest or energetic, might have effected much. He might have consolidated the royal authority, instead of leaving it weakened and decayed; he might have bettered the condition of the people, and not have driven them to desperation; by doing nothing, by allowing matters to take their course, he entailed numberless evils on France and on his own posterity.

It was the greatest misfortune of Louis XV. to have been badly educated. The opposite and pernicious influences of his preceptor Fleury and his governor Villeroi may be traced in every error of his life. Fleury, either actuated by personal ambition, or fearing the effects of the rashness natural to a young and inexperienced monarch, instead of teaching his pupil how to command for the good of the people, only taught him to obey. This mistaken policy, joined to the apathetic temper of the young king, rendered him, at a later period, the slave of his ministers and mistresses. The Duke of Villeroi, on the other hand, impressed his pupil with the most exaggerated ideas of royal authority. Whenever on festive days crowds gathered in the garden of Versailles, Villeroi led the king to the balcony, and exclaimed, "Look at them, sire! all this people belongs to you!"—a fatal lesson, which was not lost on the future owner of the Parc aux Cerfs. It was by such teaching that Louis XV. grew up into that most despicable of kingly characters—a weak tyrant. Convinced of the sacred nature of his power, he recklessly yielded it up to every unprincipled courtesan who pleased his fancy; he thus became doubly guilty, since, whilst he betrayed the people he was bound to govern and protect, he also degraded that principle of the divine right of kings, in the belief of which he had been brought up.

It was long, however, ere the errors of Louis XV. could make him forfeit the love of the people. Whenever he appeared in public, the grace and youthful majesty of his person, his mild and handsome Bourbon countenance, and those deep-blue eyes, of a hue held to be unrivalled, ex-

cited universal admiration and sympathy. But even then, those whose glance went deeper than mere externals, saw serious cause for apprehension in the temper of the young king; and many could trace the future selfish voluptuary in the cold irony which already marred the sweetness of his smile.

The natural temper of Louis XV. was, nevertheless, amiable: the selfishness he displayed was more the result of his position than that of his nature. He was incapable, however, of a deep feeling of attachment, and only loved through habit, which was all-powerful over him. He never made but a petty use of his power: even in his youth he was not averse to the satisfaction of mortifying a presumptuous courtier, or of keeping him in suspense concerning his real intentions. Though too indolent and apathetic to be vindictive, a feeling which implies energy, he never forgave or forgot an injury. His mind was superior to his character: no courtier surpassed him in keen, caustic wit or happy repartee; his judgment was clear, sound, and penetrating; the opinions he emitted on state affairs often struck his ministers as so many rays of light. But it was seldom that Louis XV. cared to have an opinion on any matter unconnected with his pleasures; more seldom still that he persisted in following his own judgment: he went through the business of the state with evident indifference and ennui. An education that fostered such feelings led directly to sensuality, and though nothing could be further from Fleury's intention than this sad result, it was the only one his ill-directed teaching could reap. Before becoming renowned for his licentiousness, Louis XV. was already remarkable for *gourmandise;* and the presence of a new cook in the royal kitchen was an event of sufficient importance to be mentioned in the king's letters to his friends. Too weak for ardent religious feelings, he gave his whole attention to superstitious observances and a perfect knowledge of the rubric; congratulating himself whenever he could find a courtly bishop in fault.

The young king found no resources against ennui in litera-

ture. Fleury disliked and distrusted the productions of his own times, and inspired his pupil with the same feeling. Louis XV. always shewed a decided aversion to the bel esprit which characterised the period: he shunned the society of the brilliant Madame du Maine, whilst he courted that of her amiable and unassuming sister-in-law, Madame de Toulouse. Thus leading a life of indolence and sensuality, Louis XV. could not always find in hunting, or in a puerile devotion, a sufficient source of pleasure; he accordingly indulged in the most effeminate amusements. At one time the whole court was thrown into great commotion by a sudden fancy which the king took for worsted work. A courier was instantly despatched to Paris for wool, needles, and canvas; he only took two hours and a half to go and come back, and the same day all the courtiers in Versailles were seen, with the Duke of Gesvres at their head, embroidering, like the sovereign. But even *tapisserie* was ineffectual to allay those periodical attacks of despondency to which Louis was subject from his youth, and during which his only pleasure was to entertain those around him with long and dismal accounts of graveyards, sudden deaths, and all the melancholy pageantry of stately funeral processions.

The great care which Fleury had taken to preserve him from the contamination of his court, long rendered the young king indifferent to any woman but his wife, the good but unattractive Marie Lecsinska. When the nobles pointedly drew his attention to the beauty of a court lady, Louis coldly asked if they thought her handsomer than the queen? Had Marie Lecsinska been a woman of tact and talent, she would have found it an easy task to govern her husband; but, instead of conciliating him, she unfortunately alienated his affection by her injudicious caprices. Wearied of his wife's society, Louis XV. began to indulge in those private suppers, in the company of a few favourite courtiers, which afterwards became so celebrated. It was at one of those suppers that the king first noticed Madame de Mailly, one of the plainest women of his court, but who pleased him by her mirth and good temper.

He made her his mistress, in a fit of pique against the queen. But, as he then feared scandal as much as he afterwards braved it, this intrigue was carried on with great secrecy.

Madame de Mailly was the eldest of five sisters, all fascinating in various respects, and who were destined to act a conspicuous part in the life of Louis XV.—four by their profligacy, and one by her virtue. During her connexion with the king, Madame de Mailly evinced a rare and remarkable disinterestedness. She was sincerely attached to Louis XV., and refused to meddle in political intrigues; for which the simplicity of her character rendered her wholly unfit. Those who had calculated on her easy temper as a means of rising into power—and Madame de Tencin was amongst them—were grievously disappointed in their ambitious schemes.

At the time of Madame de Mailly's favour at court, Mademoiselle de Nesle, one of her unmarried sisters, was residing in the abbey of Port-Royal. Ugly, but unprincipled and full of talent and energy, she formed the bold project of superseding her sister in the king's affections; and, by ruling over the facile Louis XV., of governing France, and ultimately all Europe. She immediately wrote to Madame de Mailly, expressing so ardent a desire of seeing the court, that her sister invited her to come and spend some time with her at Versailles. Notwithstanding her coarse and ungraceful person, and her total want of beauty, Mademoiselle de Nesle found no difficulty in fascinating Louis XV.: her brilliant and audacious wit, singular versatility of talent, and that inexhaustible power of yielding amusement—so invaluable to an indolent monarch—blinded him to the imperfections of her person. The unhappy Madame de Mailly saw herself wholly neglected for a rival,—and that rival was her sister. The scandal was great. Fleury vainly opposed the king's new mistress: her power already balanced his; and she had, moreover, the art of never allowing its weight to be felt by her royal lover. She held, however, like Lauzun, the maxim, that the timid Bourbons required to be sternly ruled. Mademoiselle de Nesle had not long been at court when she married

M. de Vintimelle, who basely agreed to this nominal and degrading alliance. Her power was already acquiring formidable proportions, and she seemed on the eve of realising her ambitious plans, when death cut her off in the prime of life. The calumnies of the courtiers attributed her end to poison, administered through the agency of Fleury; but, much as he disliked the royal mistress, the pacific cardinal was incapable of this criminal action.

The king, much affected by the death of his mistress, was seized with a sudden fit of remorse and devotion. His only comfort was in the society of the kind-hearted Madame de Mailly, with whom he deplored the loss of the deceased. His grief was, however, of brief duration: Madame de la Tournelle, another sister of Madame de Mailly's, and far more handsome than either her or Madame de Vintimelle, whom she equalled in ambition, undertook to efface the memory of her sister from the heart of the king. She fully succeeded, and was soon acknowledged as the royal mistress. Henceforth, she became the centre of all the intrigues for power and influence carried on at court. When she went with the king to Choisy, and was thus declared the favoured sultana, a numerous suite of nobles and court ladies followed in her train. The Duke and Duchess of Luynes alone refused this disgraceful honour; for which act of independence and dignity they were never forgiven by the king. One of Madame de la Tournelle's first steps was to exact that Madame de Mailly should leave the court. Her unhappy sister, who still idolised the king, vainly begged of him not to banish her from his presence: he insisted that the request of Madame de la Tournelle should be complied with; the weeping and unpitied Madame de Mailly accordingly left Versailles for ever. She retired to Paris, and, like another Mademoiselle de la Vallière, devoted herself to the service of God. Without entering a convent, she led a life of such sincere penance and mortification, that even the most rigidly virtuous were compelled to admire her. The once-beloved mistress of a king—the sharer of those voluptuous banquets where he forgot his most sacred duties—now

deprived herself of the common necessaries of life in order to relieve the poor. The abodes of want and misery henceforth became her home. She accepted every privation as a feeble atonement for her sins; and when insults followed her, even in the house of prayer, she acknowledged them to be deserved, with touching and submissive humility. A man of the people once addressed her, in the church of Saint-Roch, with a coarse epithet. "Since you know me so well," said she, calmly turning round towards him, "pray for me!"

Madame de la Tournelle, who soon became Duchess of Chateauroux, displayed a character of much ambition and energy. Her sense of virtue was still sufficiently strong for her to feel humbled by the splendid degradation she had sought and won; but, though she had not sufficient principle to recede from the path she had taken, she resolved, as an atonement, to rouse the monarch from his disgraceful lethargy. The hopes which the nation had founded on their young king were already yielding to the conviction that his indolence would never allow him to fulfil the duties of his high station. This was fully evident to those persons who moved in the higher circles. Madame de Tencin was amongst those who rightly judged that the monarch's apathy might ultimately prove fatal to France. "What happens in his kingdom," she observes of Louis XV., in her confidential letters to Richelieu, "seems to be no business of his. . . . It is even said that he avoids taking any cognisance of what occurs, averring that it is better to know nothing than to learn unpleasant tidings. This is a fine sang froid; but though I am less concerned in this than he is, I shall never equal it." "The people," she remarks further on, with a depth and truth that might have warned Louis XV., the bien-aimé, of the fate of monarchy, "only love their kings through habit." The following pithy prophecy may be quoted as a proof of her political sagacity and foresight: "Unless God visibly interferes, it is physically impossible that the state should not fall to pieces." No miracle was made in favour of those who recklessly rushed on to ruin: half a century later the descendant of Louis XV. expiated

on the scaffold the culpable indolence of his predecessor. It was perhaps disappointed ambition that induced Madame de Tencin to express herself so bitterly. Both she and her brother, as well as the Duke of Richelieu, were amongst those who shewed most anxiety to turn to their own advantage the growing power of Madame de Chateauroux. On the death of Fleury, Madame de Tencin spared no insinuating flattery in order to induce Madame de Chateauroux to use her influence in favour of her brother. "A clever woman," she writes to Richelieu, "knows how to unite pleasure and general interest. Without wearying her lover, she can make him do what she likes. My brother could consult with her on this subject," (a cardinal of the Church and a royal mistress!) "and I have enough vanity to think I could become one of the principal springs of the great machinery it is her intention to set in motion." Had this plan succeeded—Madame de Chateauroux governing the king, and the cardinal being in his turn governed by his sister—Madame de Tencin would have become the great arbiter of every important question in France. Without meaning to assert that this unprincipled woman could or would have done much for the good of the country, it is evident that her double connexion with the government and the philosophic party might have tended to heal up the breach already existing between them both. But Madame de Chateauroux had not acquired her power in order to yield it up to another woman, and especially to so clever and intriguing a woman as Madame de Tencin. She was, moreover, surrounded by friends who gave her lessons in politics, in order that she might be fully qualified for her post; and by whose advice she confirmed the king in his dislike for the cardinal, and gave every important office to her own creatures. Madame de Chateauroux was, nevertheless, deeply convinced, like Madame de Tencin, of the necessity of some radical change in the government. Of the confusion by which it was characterised she spoke thus to a friend: "I could not have believed all that I now see; if no remedy is administered to this state of things, there will, sooner or later, be a great *bouleversement.*"

Though the aim of Madame de Chateauroux was good, the means she took to effect it were not equally praiseworthy. Reckless of the real interests of the country, and desiring ardently to be the mistress of a great and admired monarch, she partly precipitated France into a fatal war, destined to humble Austria, and raise the unhappy Charles VII. to the throne of that empire. Like another Agnès Sorel, she urged the king to take the command of his army, and resolved to accompany him. This Louis forbade; but Madame de Chateauroux, taking the advice of Richelieu, her relative and most devoted courtier, privately followed Louis XV. in spite of his prohibition: she was accompanied by her sister, Madame de Lauragais, who shared with her the king's favour. Two princesses of the blood, the Duchess of Modena, formerly Mademoiselle de Valois, and the Princess of Conti, unblushingly followed in the train of the royal favourites.

The king had been received with enthusiasm by the army and the provinces; but when his mistress appeared everywhere with him, this feeling was changed to one of deep indignation at the unblushing effrontery of royal profligacy. The king's sudden and dangerous illness at Metz tended to increase this feeling. Two parties were now formed around the sick-bed of the monarch. The religious party, attached to the devout Marie Lecsinska, asserted that his most Christian Majesty and eldest son of the Church could not die without receiving the last sacraments; the condition on which they would be administered to him being the public dismissal of his paramour. The other party, that of Madame de Chateauroux, contended that the king was not beyond hope, and strained every nerve to keep him in this belief. Divided between his love for Madame de Chateauroux, and his terrors of eternal punishment, Louis XV. knew not how to act. Religious dread at length prevailed: for a servile fear, and not sincere penitence, was the only feeling his weak mind could know. The king ended by yielding to the advice of his confessor: he publicly begged the queen's pardon, expressed his sorrow for the evil example he had set to his subjects, and ordered

Madame de Chateauroux and her sister to be dismissed. This was done by her enemies with every mark of contempt. The two women, suddenly deserted by the courtiers, left the house where the king was lying ill, amidst the hootings of the populace; from whose fury they had to be protected during the whole of their journey to Paris.

The king had scarcely made this sacrifice to his fears of eternity when he recovered. The joy of the whole nation was so deep and real, that the monarch justly received the title of bien-amié. The churches, which during his illness had been filled to overflowing with worshippers petitioning Heaven in his behalf, now resounded with joyful *Te Deums* This feeling of gladness was greatly increased by a universal belief in the sincerity of the king's repentance. The poissardes of the Halle observed, in their own significant and impressive language, that if the king took back his mistress he might die without getting so much as a *Pater* or an *Ave* from them. This was the greatest threat of the women who exulted over the fate of Louis XVI., and followed Marie-Antoinette to the scaffold.

When the king was fully recovered, and had returned to Versailles, he fell into a fit of melancholy abstraction, of which the courtiers easily suspected the motive. The repentance of Louis XV. had never been heartfelt: it sprang from terror; and now that the death he had feared seemed once more distant, he felt both mortified at the humiliating part he had acted, and grieved at the loss of Madame de Chateauroux. Unable, or rather unwilling, to resist the pleadings of his love, he privately sought his injured and now neglected mistress. The result of this interview was soon known; for in a few days Maurepas, the mortal enemy of the duchess, called upon her, and, in the presence of a numerous assembly, humbly requested her, in the name of the king, to forgive the injurious manner in which she had been treated during his Majesty's illness, as well as to return to his court. Madame de Chateauroux, who was then slightly indisposed, answered, that as soon as she was recovered she should be happy to

obey the king's commands. This mortification had been inflicted, at her request, on Maurepas, as the first of those steps of retaliation, in which her haughty temper already meant to indulge on her return to court. But to that station, which she had purchased at the cost of peace and honour, she was never destined to return: her illness soon assumed an alarming character, and ere long the doctors declared her case hopeless. In a few days after the visit of Maurepas she died in the arms of the forgiving Madame de Mailly, and with promises of future penance on her lips; to verify which, life was not granted to her.

The death of his mistress overwhelmed the king with despair: it is said she was the only woman he ever really and sincerely loved. During her brief illness he shewed the greatest grief, and caused prayers to be offered up everywhere for her recovery. The death of Madame de Chateauroux was, like that of her sister, attributed to poison; but the only proof of this assertion was the fear her return to court excited in the minds of those who had imprudently declared themselves her enemies at Metz. Madame de Chateauroux was buried with great privacy in the church of Saint-Sulpice. An armed escort accompanied her coffin to the grave, lest the hatred of the populace should vent itself on her senseless remains.

This hatred was scarcely justified. Without seeking to palliate her errors, it may be asserted that Madame de Chateauroux was infinitely superior to the women by whom she was succeeded. She did not, like them, make an open traffic of her power: on being once offered a large sum in order to favour an individual at court, she refused with indignation and contempt. Her sense of the degradation of her position was never entirely obliterated. The dignified gentleness of the injured queen always affected her painfully: she confessed herself humbled in her presence. The pure and suffering Marie Lecsinska could have asked for no greater vengeance to fall on the haughty Madame de Chateauroux, than this feeling of humiliation and shame. It would also be

unjust to deny Madame de Chateauroux the merit of having sought to rouse Louis XV. from the state of apathetic indolence into which he had fallen. The means she took were injudicious, and led to new misfortunes; but her aim was noble. Experience might have taught her a better use of her power. Had that power lasted, as there is little doubt that it would, if her life had been prolonged, Louis XV. might have been another man.

The people, however, hated Madame de Chateauroux, without regard to the good or evil she might effect, because she seemed to them the personification of royal profligacy in its worst form. It was a fact beyond dispute that she had succeeded her two eldest sisters in the favour of the king, and it was generally believed that she had shared that favour with her sister, Madame de Lauragais. A corrupted court might look with indifference on such things: nor was royal profligacy treated with much severity in the philosophic circles; but in the mass of the nation, where the sense of morality and decency still survived, such facts, linked with the sovereign's name, only excited abhorrence and disgust. It did not tend to soften this feeling that, whilst the king forgot his duties and every honourable thought in guilty indulgences, the state of the country daily became worse. The unhappy and oppressed peasantry were the principal sufferers. The nobles themselves began to be alarmed at the consequences of so much misery. In the year 1739, fifty years before the French Revolution, whilst the country was in a state of peace, and the crops were of average abundance, men, according to the testimony of a contemporary minister, died by thousands, after vainly endeavouring to appease with grass the cravings of hunger. When the king was once holding his council, his relative the Duke of Orleans placed on the table before him a piece of bread made of heath, uttering the ominous words:—"Sire, this is the food of your subjects." The general misery spread even to the neighbourhood of Versailles, and still more unwelcome intimations of the truth than those which came from his counsellors met the king's ears. When he traversed the suburbs

of Paris, whilst going to his pleasure seats, the people no longer cried out, "Vive le Roi!" but "Famine" and "Bread!" Once, as he was hunting in the forest of Senart, he met a peasant on horseback, carrying a coffin before him. "For whom is that coffin?" asked the king, stopping. "For a man of ——." "Of what did he die?" "Of hunger," abruptly said the peasant, looking at him fixedly as he spoke. The king asked no more questions, but spurred his horse, and rode on.

Was there nothing in this reply of a subject to his sovereign? No warning of a lowering future? Nothing beyond the mere intimation that a man had died of hunger, within a few steps, perhaps, of the royal Versailles, that seat of corrupt luxury? If there was anything more, Louis XV. heeded it not: casting the burden of his sins on his innocent descendant, leaving him to expiate the accumulated evils of ages, he strove to forget what he had heard, and sought not to learn more.

It is not without deep reluctance that we have paused in our task, in order to place before our readers these pictures of royal profligacy; but they were necessary to the understanding of what has preceded, as well as to the full comprehension of what is to follow. Will it be wondered at that such a court should have little power? That, whilst royal courtesans governed the political kingdom, the social world sought, if not a purer, at least a freer and more intellectual atmosphere? It was this corrupt weakness of the court, and that increasing influence of society, which raised the formidable power of the most celebrated man of the age: it was these which gave him the keen weapon of ridicule he wielded so ruthlessly and so long; which made him protest by cynical writings against cynical abuses, and prepared the destruction of the brilliant society which almost worshipped the name of Voltaire.

Nor was this society unconscious of its own fate. Three women, with that instinctive foresight which arises from the keenness of their perceptions, had already predicted the issue of all this. The honest indignation of Mademoiselle Aïssé,

the sense of Madame de Tencin, and the love of Madame de Chateauroux, led them to the same conclusions: the forthcoming and inevitable ruin of the state. It is a great but common error to suppose that only a few statesmen like Turgot, and that almost on the eve of the Revolution, could foretell what was then visible to every one. The predictions of the three ladies already quoted, if less detailed and eloquent, are fully as significant, and have undoubtedly the merit of priority. It is, therefore, an error to think that the consciousness of a future crisis, then generally felt in society, was one "to which only the manly and far-seeing mind of Turgot could give complete utterance, by predicting, as we find him doing, that society was then hurrying on to some frightful convulsion."*

Such feelings naturally added to the power of the philosophic and literary circles. It is true these circles were far from being pure; their licentiousness was even the more repulsive that it was accompanied by so much intellect: but, at the same time, there is, and always will be, in intellect, an irresistible attraction; inducing men, not to excuse, but to suffer its errors, for the sake of the good by which they are redeemed. Intellect is the source of moral greatness and excellence. If it has been perverted, if the divine gift has been turned into evil, yet, even from that very perversion, future good may arise. Never was this principle more forcibly illustrated than in the times of which we are speaking. Against the sensual profligacy of falling monarchy, arose the formidable array of intellectual licence. The rulers of France had recklessly trampled on every moral right. The philosophers as ruthlessly destroyed every divine tie, which, by linking man to Heaven, so firmly knits him to his brother man.

With the rudeness of the Middle Ages vanished those stern and chivalrous virtues which have rendered them immortal. The philosophers acted as though they had resolved that not even the memory of those heroic times should remain as a

* Letters of Eminent Persons to David Hume. Introductory notice by J. H. Burton.

link between the degenerated descendants of Bayard and Dugueselin and the sons of the serfs: the pure and hallowed name of the maiden who freed her country from the stranger's yoke was held up to scorn in licentious strains. Everywhere the past was insulted and reviled; everywhere moral ruins, more fearful than the empty and violated tombs of the royal dead in the abbey of Saint-Denis during the Revolution, met the beholder's eye: for on the human mind there had fallen a blight, which will make the eighteenth century appear for ever as a wide and fearful gulf between the past and the future of France.

There is greatness in this power of intellect. True, it went too far; true, it added to the work of destruction; but, let it be remembered, the "mission" of the times was to destroy, not to erect or create. In the moral as well as in the physical world, life may spring even from corruption and decay; and if institutions perish, there is a power of truth in the heart of man which cannot die.

CHAPTER III.

VOLTAIRE AND MADAME DU CHATELET.

THE name of Voltaire fills the whole of the eighteenth century. It has seldom been given to one man, and that man an author, to exercise so great a power as that which he possessed. By identifying himself with all the passions, feelings, and prejudices of his contemporaries; by clothing them with that brilliant style in which he expressed his keen scepticism and easy Epicurean philosophy, he naturally became the great organ of the age: a mission which only his vast and versatile mind could fulfil.

It is impossible to speak of the eighteenth century without alluding to Voltaire. More is necessary in this case; since his fate closely connected him with one of the most remarkable women of those times, the well-known Madame du Chatelet. Voltaire has received, as the penalty of his high fame, too much unqualified praise and opprobrium. He was neither the perfect being his partisans idolised nor the monster his enemies reviled. The feeling of hatred against him has been too bitter and unrelenting. This feeling was excited by his opinions, and not by his actions. It is the doctrines he professed, and particularly the manner in which he professed them, that drew down so much animadversion on his name. In his life, Voltaire resembled other men: if he sometimes stooped to acts of petty spite and revenge unworthy of any man, many noble and generous actions nevertheless honour his memory. His errors were chiefly the result of the times on which he was cast: had he lived in a free country, and in a purer atmosphere than that which surrounded him, he would

neither have sinned so deeply, nor, to say the truth, would he have won so much fame and power.

But Voltaire came at a period when faith and morality were almost equally weak; when institutions were hastening to their inevitable decay; and he brought with him one of those sarcastic and sceptical dispositions which are of every time, though they can only fulfil their destructive task at an epoch of general weakness and degradation. The scepticism of Voltaire was displayed even in the Jesuit college where he was educated, and where one of the fathers foretold that he would prove the relentless foe of religion. No external influences removed those early signs of infidelity from the mind of the young Arouet—such was his real name. The profligate Abbé de Chateauneuf introduced him into the coterie of the old Ninon de l'Enclos, where the youth was confirmed in the free and Epicurean Deism he ever after professed. When the unknown Arouet had become M. de Voltaire the celebrated author, he found in his ambitious vanity a still greater inducement to follow the creed of the profligate and elegant society whose approbation he always courted with passionate eagerness.

That his scepticism was neither very bold nor original, the timidity of his earlier works clearly proves. Success, by revealing to him the extent of his power, first rendered him reckless and free: whilst the world for which he wrote admired him, and shared his feelings, Voltaire might well despise the paltry persecutions of a weak government. Had he appeared at another period, and attacked the prevalent opinions of society with the same perseverance he displayed in attacking things that were falling to ruin, he could justly have been termed a daring thinker. As it was, he had little claim to that title. The world was with him, and he knew it well: he knew that even those whose position bound them to persecute him openly, favoured him and his doctrine in the secret of their hearts; and the consciousness of this might well act as a compensation for whatever annoyances he had to endure.

From the first, Voltaire was guided by the desire of success.

He attacked what he believed to be error, and what he supported he considered to be the truth; but, in all that he upheld and opposed, he was not actuated by that singleness of purpose which elevates and purifies the mind. It was in this respect that Voltaire was eminently a sceptic. Faith was not in his nature: he never had that fervent and disinterested love of truth which, even in an erroneous cause, can make heroes and martyrs. He wrote for glory and distinction: a few court favours, without changing his creed, would have kept him silent. It is this want of earnestness, and not merely his scepticism, that ought to be condemned. What right had the man who valued his own opinions so little, to insult and revile the creed of others? What right had he, for the gratification of his vanity, to sow doubt and dismay in the minds of those who believed and found consolation in that belief?

There is much in this that explains the inconsistency of Voltaire's attacks on Revelation, the insincerity by which he disgraced and forwarded his cause, and the perfidious use which he made of ridicule, where, if truth was with him, reasoning ought to have sufficed. It was thus that he gratified his insatiable wish for fame: but it was dearly purchased at the cost of morality and an honourable independence. Voltaire was, however, by the nature of his mind, less guilty than this assertion may at first seem to imply. The truth is, that he had no fixed principles on any subject: he passed from one impression to another with an ease and rapidity almost unequalled. He was susceptible of any emotion; and though sense and sarcasm predominated in his mind, they never ruled it entirely. This infinite variety of impulses, which gave so great a charm to his style, rendered his character an extraordinary compound of the most opposite qualities and defects. Voltaire was, at the same time, generous and vindictive; independent, and yet a flatterer of the great; timid, and ever committing himself by new acts of imprudence: he even reconciled the seeming impossibility of warm but transient enthusiasm accompanied by a scoffing scepticism.

But Voltaire, in good or in evil, never went beyond mere

There is nothing great in his private or in his public life. Those who loved and admired him most, confessed that the restless vivacity of his mind wearied even whilst it dazzled. He passed from childish impatience to rapturous admiration, and from that again to deep sarcasm and irony; but whichever mood he took, it was marred by the want of that stability of principle, without which a character will ever fail in grace and harmony.

The writings of Voltaire bear the impress of his mind. They have all the vivacity and versatility of talent by which he was characterised. His prose is still unrivalled for clearness, purity, and elegance. As a poet—if, indeed, Voltaire may be called a poet—he ranks infinitely lower. All his works are disfigured by that intolerant and declamatory tone which contributed to their immense success, but which has been justly reproved by posterity. Great geniuses belong to every age: Voltaire was essentially the man of his own times. He had, indeed, no aspirations higher than those of the world in which he lived: that world was moral, was great enough for him. He was indifferent to serious political changes: his tastes and feelings were essentially aristocratic. At the same time his keen and practical good sense made him desire ardently the total freedom and independence of thought—the true basis of every other freedom—and the absence of which was doubly galling to a mind so impatient of restraint as was his. These remarks on Voltaire are by no means intended as a comprehensive view of his extraordinary and varied character; they were introduced because, however superficial they may be, the subject of this work rendered them indispensable.

We have already mentioned that the fate of Voltaire was closely linked with that of an eminent woman of those times, Madame du Chatelet, whose commanding mind understood and commented on Newton and Leibnitz, and entitled her to the high praise bestowed upon her by M. Ampère: "C'est un génie et géomètre!" Emilie Gabrielle de Breteuil had received a classical education, to which was united every ac-

impulse. There is nothing great in his private or in his public life. Those who loved and admired him most, confessed that the endless vivacity of his mind wearied even whilst it dazzled. He passed from childish impatience to rapturous admiration, and from that again to deep sarcasm and irony; but whichever mood he took, it was marred by the want of that stability of principle, without which a character will ever fail in grace and harmony.

The writings of Voltaire bear the impress of his mind. They have all the vivacity and versatility of talent by which he was characterised. His prose is still unrivalled for clearness, purity, and elegance. As a poet—if, indeed, Voltaire may be called a poet—he ranks infinitely lower. All his works are disfigured by that intolerant and declamatory tone which contributed to their immense success, but which has been justly reproved by posterity. Great geniuses belong to every age: Voltaire was essentially the man of his own times. He had, indeed, no aspirations higher than those of the world in which he lived: that world was moral, was great enough for him. He was indifferent to serious political changes: his tastes and feelings were essentially aristocratic. At the same time his keen and practical good sense made him desire ardently the total freedom and independence of thought —the true basis of every other freedom—and the absence of which was doubly galling to a mind so impatient of restraint as was his. These remarks on Voltaire are by no means intended as a comprehensive view of his extraordinary and varied character; they were introduced because, however deficient they may be, the subject of this work rendered them indispensable.

We have already mentioned that the fate of Voltaire was closely linked with that of an eminent woman of those times, Madame du Chatelet, whose commanding mind understood and commented on Newton and Leibnitz, and entitled her to the high praise bestowed upon her by M. Ampère: "C'est un génie en géométrie!" Emilie Gabrielle de Breteuil had received a classical education, to which was united every ac-

Madame du Chatelet.

complishment then in fashion; she had an excellent knowledge of Latin, Italian, and English. Her parents married her in her nineteenth year to the Marquis du Chatelet, an honest but commonplace man considerably her senior.

The young marchioness made her appearance in the world with much éclat. She was tall and graceful, and her blue eyes, dark hair, and expressive countenance entitled her, in youth, to the epithet of handsome. Her great talents long remained unsuspected. The world only saw in her a fine woman who sang and played exquisitely, and who seemed passionately fond of dress, hunting, and cavagnole. The Duke of Richelieu was then at the height of his fame for gallantry; few of the women to whom he paid any attention had sufficient principle to resist him. Madame du Chatelet, whose ideas of morality were those of her time, proved no exception to the general rule. The connexion between her and the duke was, however, extremely brief, and ended—very differently from most of his love intrigues—in a sincere and mutual friendship. Madame du Chatelet afterwards alluded to this transient liaison, in her letters to the Duke of Richelieu, with a mixture of regret and levity characteristic of the period. "Who would have thought," she wrote to her former lover, after a fit of illness, "that friendship could have caused me to be regretted by Madame de Richelieu, Voltaire, and you? I scarcely hoped for love to do this. We are happy only by these two feelings. I confess that in them lies all the happiness of my life." And further on, "I believe in my own worth since I begin to think that you have a sincere friendship for me. You know my heart, and how really engrossed it is now"—(by Voltaire)—"I feel proud of loving in you the friend of my lover. This feeling would add to the pleasure which I find in our friendship, if I had not embittered it. I cannot forgive myself for having entertained any other feeling for you, however slight it may have been." Of poor M. du Chatelet, or of regret at deceiving him, not one word.

Madame du Chatelet loved pleasure, but she was not fitted

The knowledge which the reader already possesses of the maxims of those times, will explain why the connexion of Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet was considered neither guilty nor unusual by the society in which they lived. No one therefore expressed any surprise when Voltaire took up his residence at Cirey, a splendid château which M. du Chatelet possessed in the province of Lorraine. As it was necessary, however, to observe appearances, Voltaire protested that his attachment for Madame du Chatelet was purely platonic. "I confess," he observed, "that she is tyrannical: one must talk about metaphysics when the temptation is to talk of love. Ovid was formerly my master, it is now the turn of Locke." M. du Chatelet either did not suspect the truth, or if he did, he felt indifferent to it. He certainly raised no objection to the sojourn of Voltaire under his roof, and was rather flattered at being considered the host and patron of a man already enjoying European fame. As he spent the greatest portion of his time with his regiment, his presence proved little or no restraint to the lovers, who treated him with great respect.

The fifteen years which he spent at Cirey were perhaps the happiest Voltaire ever knew, notwithstanding the occasional differences which arose between him and Madame du Chatelet. To a man so eminently intellectual as he was, so much attached to every elegance and refinement of private life, no woman, unless one almost as highly gifted as himself, could have long proved attractive. Such, if the praise of a lover is to be trusted, was Madame du Chatelet:—

"L'esprit sublime et la délicatesse,
L'oubli charmant de sa propre beauté,
L'amitié tendre et l'amour emporté,
Sont les attraits de ma belle maîtresse."

The mind of Madame du Chatelet was greatly superior to her personal attractions, and even to her learning. Without excusing her relaxed morals, it must be admitted that, notwithstanding her errors, she possessed great qualities. As a friend, she was devoted and sincere. Her attachment for

Voltaire was full of truth and earnestness. She made it her constant task to soothe his susceptible vanity, hushing up by her personal influence the ridicule his imprudences so often excited, and concealing from him those contemptible libels of his enemies, by which he was so deeply distressed during his whole lifetime. Madame du Chatelet was herself nobly indifferent to such attacks. On being shewn one day a pamphlet in which she had not been spared, she calmly observed, "If the author has lost his time in writing such nonsense, I shall not lose mine in reading it." She learned the next day that the guilty individual had been imprisoned, and immediately wrote to obtain his release. She succeeded, but never let him know from whom he had received this favour.

Few women of her time were so free as Madame du Chatelet from that intriguing spirit and thirst for distinction by which almost all were then possessed. Science she loved for its own sake: for the pure and exquisite delights it yielded to her inquiring mind, and not for the paltry gratification of being considered a learned woman. She never sought to gather a literary coterie around her; never shewed the least wish to dictate in matters of which she was so excellent a judge. Many persons with whom she was in the habit of associating remained unconscious of her great talents, so little did she care to display them. Indifferent to praise, unless when it came from experienced judges, and then she probably felt it to be her due, she always disdained the easy advantage of shining amongst the ignorant. It was this love of science for its own sake, this haughty contempt of easy and showy success, that rendered Madame du Chatelet infinitely superior to the women with whom she mingled; and which almost maddened the envious Madame du Deffand, whilst it even discomposed the philosophy of the more amiable Madame de Staal.

At the same time it must be confessed that, even morality and religion set apart, the character of Madame du Chatelet was far from being a faultless one. With all her philosophy, she was as proud of her rank and birth as any court lady.

She treated her inferiors with a cold superciliousness, that shewed she fully felt their vast distance from herself. Her delicacy on many points was nowise remarkable. According to Madame de Graffingy, she was in the habit of opening all the letters that left Cirey or came to it, probably fearing lest anything concerning herself or Voltaire should be divulged. Her temper was violent and imperious. She ruled despotically over her lover, and left him very little personal freedom. Had he yielded entirely to her influence in literary matters, he would have written fewer tragedies, and devoted more of his time to science and history. It was indeed chiefly to comply with her wishes that he wrote "L'Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations." The good qualities of Madame du Chatelet consisted more in a certain haughty independence of mind, in an untiring affection for those whom she loved, than in any very amiable traits. She was deficient in gentleness and in many of the most winning qualities of woman, but there was nevertheless in her so little affectation and intrigue, and so much of what was good and true, as to command respect, at an epoch when other women, possessing her position in life and her great mental acquirements, would not have rested satisfied until they had made France and all Europe echo with their praises.

It was by her simplicity of manner, as well as by the great solidity of her judgment, that Madame du Chatelet charmed Voltaire; too keen a judge of everything like affectation to tolerate it long. Even as it was, his satirical vein could not always refrain from an indirect sneer at the divine Emilie's enthusiastic pursuit of algebra, which was somewhat singularly mingled with more frivolous tastes. Madame du Chatelet appears to have been very much attached to *pompoms*, a favourite ornament in the dress of the times. Voltaire observes, in his correspondence :—

> "Cette belle âme est une étoffe
> Qu'elle brode en mille façons;
> Son esprit est très philosophe,
> Et son cœur aime les pompoms."

"Mais les pompoms et le monde sont de son âge, et son mérite est au dessus de son âge, de son sexe et du nôtre." According to the same authority, Voltaire himself was by no means indifferent to his toilet, and appeared in Cirey attired with all the elegance of a courtier of Versailles.

The life of this learned couple in their delightful retreat was one of study, varied by elegant pleasures. The apartments they occupied at Cirey were adorned with all the luxuries art and wealth could devise. Costly hangings, choice pictures, and rare books; everything, in short, which could attract the eye and please the mind was there. Voltaire caused, at great expense, a gallery to be fitted up with all the scientific instruments he and Madame du Chatelet needed. In this gallery also stood a statue of Cupid—no unapt illustration of their scientific loves—with the famous inscription beneath it:—

"Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître!
Il l'est, le fut, et le doit être."

Over the entrance to this gallery, Voltaire had likewise caused to be inscribed:—

"Asile des beaux-arts, solitude où mon cœur
Est toujours occupé dans une paix profonde,
C'est vous qui donnez le bonheur
Qui promettait en vain le monde!"

The door of the little belvedere where Madame du Chatelet studied was also poetically adorned:—

"Du repos une douce étude;
Peu de livres, point d'ennuyeux,
Un ami dans la solitude,
Voilà mon sort! —il est heureux."

Voltaire celebrated his love for Madame du Chatelet under almost every form. He wrote innumerable verses in her praise, and seemed never weary of mentioning her great talents and excellent qualities to his friends. The sincerity and disinterestedness of her affection, the admirable strength and clearness of her comprehensive mind, are themes to which he ever willingly returns in his correspondence. Madame du Chatelet

was no poet; she, however, composed a Latin verse for Voltaire, which was afterwards engraved on his tomb—

"Postgenitis hic carus erit, nunc carus amicis."

Madame du Chatelet only slept for three hours, in order to leave more time for study. Her temper was too ardent to allow her to follow Montesquieu's judicious advice: "You do not sleep in order to study philosophy; but you should, on the contrary, study philosophy in order to learn how to sleep soundly." The whole of the day was also devoted to her beloved studies. She seldom came down to dinner, but remained closeted in her apartment, commenting on Newton and Leibnitz, or continuing her written and animated controversy with M. de Mairan, the secretary of the Academy of Sciences. Besides her correspondence with Richelieu and Maupertuis, she wrote to several philosophers, and, among the rest, to Diderot, for whom she employed her influence when his imprudent writings had caused him to be incarcerated in Vincennes.

Voltaire, in the meanwhile, was composing "Mérope," or "Zaïre," by stealth: for Madame du Chatelet, herself wrapped up in algebra, always discouraged his poetical labours; or he was adding, perchance, a few pages to his "Siècle de Louis XIV." He occasionally diversified these occupations by peevishly fretting over some new libel of the Abbé Desfontaines, which had reached him, notwithstanding all Madame du Chatelet's vigilance; or by sending off to his Parisian friends those inimitable letters of his, which sparkle with all the wit, satire, and caprice of his versatile mind. Epigrams against his enemies; extravagant praises of the divine Emilie, of whose yoke he was sometimes heartily weary, or of Frederick of Prussia; querulous complaints of the persecutions which he, favoured among all who ever wrote, is compelled to endure; bursts of philosophic intolerance, succeeded by the effusions of a generous spirit, and the most amusing assurances, daily repeated for the last fifty years of his life, "that he is positively dying:" such are a few of the many characteristics of Voltaire's long and varied correspondence.

He did not meet Madame du Chatelet until the hour of supper. She then came down, and the rest of the evening was spent in conversation. Voltaire submitted his labours of the day to her judgment; Madame du Chatelet spoke of her scientific pursuits, giving a charm to those abstruse matters by the clearness and elegance of her language. Though she devoted almost the whole of her time to science, her taste in general literature was, notwithstanding, pure and correct. She possessed that exquisite conversational style, if we may so speak, which characterised the clever women of the age; and it was whilst living in daily intercourse with her that Voltaire produced his most perfect works. Cirey was often visited by literary and scientific individuals, who came to admire the charming retirement of these two kindred spirits. Madame de Graffigny, the clever authoress of the "Peruvian Letters," spent a few weeks with them. The amiable President Hénault also appeared there, bringing with him all the philosophic satire and scandal which Madame du Deffand was gathering in her convent of Saint-Joseph. A Prussian count sent by Frederick, then crown prince of Prussia, visited Cirey, in order to present the portrait of his master to Voltaire, and indifferent verses to Venus-Newton, as the prince styled Madame du Chatelet. Madame Denise, the favourite gossiping niece of Voltaire, D'Argens, the sceptical author of the "Jewish Letters," likewise spent some time at Cirey; besides such scientific men as Maupertuis, Kœnig, Clairault, and Algarotti, who came chiefly for the purpose of conversing with Madame du Chatelet; pursuing their mutual studies in her apartment, to the great annoyance of Voltaire, who condescended to feel somewhat jealous on these occasions. Notwithstanding his secret vexation, he treated Madame du Chatelet's learned guests with due courtesy. "We read," he observes during the stay of Algarotti, "a few cantos of 'Jeanne la Pucelle,' or one of my tragedies, or a chapter from the 'Siècle of Louis XIV.' Thence we return to Locke and Newton; nor do we abstain from champagne and good cheer, for, indeed, we are very voluptuous philosophers." The tact of Madame du Chatelet diversi-

fied these amusements. She sang and played for the pleasure of her guests; or, with the aid of a few neighbours and Voltaire, acted his tragedies and comedies, on a pretty little stage, which she had caused to be constructed for that purpose. As she was an excellent actress, especially in comic parts, these entertainments proved really amusing. When Voltaire was unwell, Madame du Chatelet relinquished study and pleasure, in order to sit by his bedside and read to him the works of Cicero, Virgil, Pope, or Newton, in the original languages.

Madame du Chatelet and her lover did not, however, spend the whole of their time at Cirey. They visited Paris every year, and remained for a few months at the hotel Richelieu. The young duchess, a woman remarkable for her beauty, accomplishments, and for the passionate attachment she felt to the last for her faithless husband, was the intimate friend of Madame du Chatelet; who, as well as Voltaire, had been instrumental in effecting her marriage. She studied geometry under Maupertuis, and her knowledge of Newton's philosophy even enabled her to obtain a triumph recorded by Voltaire.*

Madame du Chatelet entered into the pursuit of pleasure with the same passionate eagerness with which she studied Newton's "Principia" in her learned retirement. Her brief sojourn in Paris was accordingly marked by a round of dissipation and amusements. As a relaxation, she occasionally gave choice déjeûners in a country auberge, to which no man was admitted. Her guests were Madame du Deffand, the profligate Madame de Boufflers, Madame de Mailly—then the king's mistress, Madame du Gonvernet, and the pretty Madame de la Popelinière. These ladies, all handsome and witty, greatly enjoyed their privacy.

* "Il faut, pourtant, vous dire, à l'honneur de notre cour de Versailles et à l'honneur des femmes, que Madame de Richelieu a fait un cours de physique dans cette salle des machines; qu'elle est devenue une assez bonne Newtonienne; et qu'elle a confondu publiquement certain prédicateur Jésuite qui ne savait que des mots, et qui s'avisa de disputer, en bavard, contre des faits et contre de l'esprit. Il fut hué avec son éloquence, et Madame de Richelieu d'autant plus admirée qu'elle est femme et duchesse."

The excessive love of dress displayed by the learned Emilie, which had induced Voltaire to name her Madame Newton-Pompom du Chatelet, often led her into serious expenses; nothing equalled, however, by the large sums she lost at play. On one night she lost no less than 80,000 livres at Versailles. Voltaire imprudently told her that she had to deal with cheats. This remark having been overheard, he was obliged to leave the palace precipitately, and seek for a refuge at Sceaux, where Madame du Maine agreed to conceal him. For six weeks he remained hidden in an upper room, writing by candle-light, and no one but Madame du Maine herself being aware of his presence. When all the inmates were at rest, he came down, supped with the duchess, and read to her fragments of his prose novels, which he had composed partly for her amusement. In the meanwhile, Madame du Chatelet was busy collecting money to pay the sum she had lost, and endeavoured to pacify the persons to whom Voltaire's imprudent remark had given offence. It was not until she had succeeded in effecting both objects, that she made her appearance at Sceaux with Voltaire.

If we may trust the petulant effusions of the ennuyée Madame de Staal to her friend Madame du Deffand, the learned pair were little appreciated by the society of Sceaux, on this visit, as well as on the subsequent ones they paid to Madame du Maine. "Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire," she observes in 1747, "who had announced their arrival for to-day, appeared yesterday, towards midnight, like two ghosts, bringing with them a smell of embalmed corpses from their tombs. Every one had already left the table; but they were famished spectres, and wanted some supper. They, moreover, required beds, which were not prepared. The porter, who was already in bed, had to rise hastily. Gaya having offered his apartment, in case of need, was now obliged to give it up. He effected his removal with as much precipitation and displeasure as an army surprised in its camp and leaving part of its baggage in the power of the foe." Further on she resumes the subject with the same irony: "Our ghosts do not shew them-

selves by daylight: they appeared yesterday at ten in the evening. I do not suppose we shall see them earlier to-day. One is busy narrating high deeds, the other comments on Newton. Madame du Chatelet has already changed her apartment three times: she could endure no longer that which she had chosen. It was full of noise and smoke, without any fire," (I rather look on this as her emblem.) "She is now taking a review of her 'principles.' She renews this practice every year, as they might escape otherwise, and go so far that she would never find one of them again. I verily believe her head is their stronghold, and not the place of their birth. She does well to watch over them carefully."

The merits of Madame du Chatelet were not indeed likely to be fully appreciated by the frivolous court of Madame du Maine. But though she devoted the whole of the day to study, she contributed in the evening to the general amusement by singing and acting the pastoral play of "Issé," and Voltaire's comedies, with so much talent that even Madame de Staal confessed herself amused. Voltaire addressed his mistress thus:—

"Charmante Issé! vous nous faites entendre
Dans ces beaux lieux les sons les plus flatteurs—
Ils vont droit à nos cœurs;
Leibnitz n'a point de nomades plus tendres,
Newton d'x x plus enchanteurs."

But notwithstanding all his poetical compliments, poor Voltaire was singularly annoyed by his "charmante Issé," who, regardless of an author's feelings, but by no means indifferent to the success of her charms, persisted in appearing in the part of the homely Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière, attired with all the elegance of a court lady. Voltaire remonstrated; but, as Madame de Staal pithily observed, "She is the mistress; he is the slave."

After spending a few months in Paris, Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet generally returned to their pleasant retreat. Events occasionally caused them to separate: their correspondence was then extremely active. According to Voisenon, Ma-

dame du Chatelet had eight thick volumes of Voltaire's letters. The same authority asserts that they contained more epigrams against religion than verses in the praise of his mistress: a fact not at all unlikely. These letters were probably destroyed by the family of Madame du Chatelet after her death, for nothing of them has remained.

Long as the love of Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet had lasted, it was not destined to resist time and habit. The first change came from Voltaire. His increasing coldness alarmed Madame du Chatelet. When she first spoke to him on the subject, he reminded her of his declining years, and answered her reproaches by the charming verses—

> "Si vous voulez que j'aime encore,
> Ah, rendez moi l'âge des amours!" &c.

After many stormy explanations, Madame du Chatelet, seeing that friendship had replaced love in Voltaire's heart, submitted to this change in his feelings; which caused none in their mode of life. An affection which could thus resist time and modify itself with years, instead of perishing utterly, must have been founded on much that was good and true.

In this altered mood the two friends proceeded from Cirey to Lunéville, where Stanislaus, the father of Marie Lecsinska, ruled over a polished and elegant little court. It was there that Madame du Chatelet first saw Saint-Lambert. He was then nothing more than a handsome young nobleman of elegant address: he afterwards obtained some reputation by his cold imitations of the English poets; but his was indeed a "tiny genius," as Walpole justly remarked. He is less known for any individual merits of his own, than for having been the successful rival in love of the two greatest writers of the age—Voltaire and Rousseau. Madame du Chatelet was still handsome; her great talents caused her to be universally admired. Vanity induced Saint-Lambert to pay her attentions which Madame du Chatelet attributed to a deeper feeling, and which she was frail enough to return by a very sincere affection. Voltaire, on discovering that he had a rival, felt both grieved and indignant. His first impulse was to

leave Madame du Chatelet immediately. Though she disguised nothing from him, her remonstrances and assurances of unabated friendship induced him to remain. Saint-Lambert, by great professions of admiration for the genius of Voltaire, even succeeded in conciliating his favour. The self-love of the poet proved stronger than the remnant of jealousy with which he had seen another possess the place he had once held in the heart of the divine Emilie.

There is little to excuse this part of Madame du Chatelet's life. Her age, and that feeling of worldly self-respect which is inspired by the fear of ridicule, ought at least to have preserved her from this last error; with which were connected many disgraceful circumstances, and which was destined to prove so fatal to her.

After a brief stay at Lunéville, Madame du Chatelet and Voltaire parted from Saint-Lambert and returned to Cirey. Madame du Chatelet seemed extremely anxious to finish her great work, the translation of Newton's "Principia:" she laboured at it both day and night, and appeared to possess a foreboding of her melancholy fate. Neither the efforts of Voltaire nor the letters of Saint-Lambert could remove her despondency. On her return to Lunéville, her health, which had been failing for some time, became worse, and on the 10th of August 1749, she died in childbed, after a few days of brief illness.

Voltaire was overwhelmed with despair, and his grief was both lasting and sincere. Shortly after the death of Madame du Chatelet, we find him writing thus to D'Argental:—

"I am going to Cirey for two days. Thence I shall go to spend two days more with a friend of this great man and this unhappy woman. . . . . I will even acknowledge to you, that a house which she once inhabited, though it may overwhelm me with grief, is not disagreeable to me. I do not dread my affliction; I do not avoid that which may remind me of her: I like Cirey; I could not bear Lunéville, where I lost her in a more melancholy manner than you can imagine. But the place which she once embellished is dear to me. It

is not a mistress that I have lost: I have lost the half of my being—a soul for which mine was made—a friend of twenty years, whom I had known since her birth. The most tender father feels no different love for his only daughter. I like to find a memorial of her everywhere."

There is much that is touching in these simple expressions of grief; much that explains, better than the most elaborate commentary, the affection which united Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet.

Scarcely was the unhappy woman in her grave, when all the opprobrium, all the bitter revilings, which malice and envy could rouse against her, followed her memory. There is something literally revolting in the brutality with which the errors of Madame du Chatelet were attacked. Her intimate friend, Madame du Deffand, distinguished herself by her bitterness. She wrote, and caused to be extensively circulated, a portrait of the deceased lady, in which her person and her life were equally villified. When this production was shewn by the author to Thomas, he coolly observed, that it reminded him of an observation once made by a medical acquaintance of his concerning one of his patients: "My friend fell ill; I attended him. He died; and I dissected him." We do not intend to justify Madame du Chatelet: she doubtless committed great errors; but those who attacked and held up her failings to the pitiless derision of the world had no right to do so. Madame du Chatelet erred because she adopted their principles, and put them into practice: three times in her life she had wandered from the straight path. Would Madame du Deffand and her associates in malice have been able to specify the number of their errors? She was frail, when they were profligate: she yielded to passion, when they gave themselves up to licentiousness. The real cause why Madame du Chatelet's memory was treated with so much bitterness was her great superiority to most of the women with whom she associated. She equalled them in that graceful wit of which they were so vain, but she disdained to apply it to the purpose of gathering around her a coterie of ad-

mirers; and she surpassed them, not only by that dignified disdain, but also by a superiority of intellect, and by an aptitude for science to which few women have attained. It was this, and to have fascinated such a man as Voltaire, that could not be, and was not, forgiven.

Those who would have had some right to speak—the women whose pure and unblemished lives were the open condemnation of Madame du Chatelet's errors—remained silent; the task of upbraiding her memory was left to her former friends: to those who, during her lifetime, would have derided her scruples, had she manifested any. Some there were, however, besides Voltaire and her intimate friends, who, whilst they were not blind to her errors, could acknowledge Madame du Chatelet's high qualities. Amongst these was Clairault, who had been one of her instructors: he testified the deepest grief on hearing of her death, and immediately went into mourning; he was never heard to speak of her but with mingled admiration and respect. The grief of Voltaire naturally subsided with time; but he never forgot Madame du Chatelet. When he mentioned her name, it was with a tender feeling of regret for her loss, and an enthusiastic admiration of her great talents. After her death, he chiefly resided in Switzerland; where, as it was his lot to be swayed by women, he submitted to the dominion of the extravagant Madame Denis. As he grew in years, Voltaire increased in power and fame. All the sovereigns of Europe paid their court to the illustrious patriarch of Ferney. The man who was rapidly and surely aiding the destruction of society, was still, as a token of the times, its cherished idol.

If so much space—with regard to the limits of this work—has been devoted to Madame du Chatelet, it is not merely on account of her own personal merits, or even because of her connexion with Voltaire. The reader who wishes to know what the aristocracy of those times really were, can judge of them now, better than by any mere assertion of the author. Madame du Chatelet is a very favourable and appropriate

illustration of her class. Her relaxed morals—the mixture of pride, worldliness, and intellect, by which she was distinguished—her strong tendency towards what was then called philosophy—her external observance of every *convenance*—and her total want of religious feeling—are alike characteristic of her station and of her age. The few incidents of her life are equally significant. Her connexion with Voltaire, (which, on account of the great difference of rank between them, would have been an event unheard of a century earlier;) the easy tolerance of her husband; the facility with which Voltaire himself allowed Saint-Lambert to replace him in her affections, alike betray the gradual decline of the old nobles, and the increasing corruption of the times. But though it is chiefly as a sample of what the women of high rank then really were that Madame du Chatelet has been considered here, it is not intended to assert that she had no personal influence. Far from it; she not only contributed to spread among her countrymen a greater knowledge of scientific matters, but, by her own example, added to the strength of the Anglomania which was already beginning to prevail in France.

Voltaire, Madame du Chatelet, and Montesquieu were among the first who introduced into polite society the admiration of England. The regent, before his accession to power, and whilst still under the dominion of Louis XIV., had loudly praised, with his roués, that independence which existed in the neighbouring country. His own personal sympathies connected him with the House of Hanover, and to which his mother was allied. Even then the Orleans branch of the royal family was suspected of a wish to profit by the errors of the reigning Bourbons, as the House of Hanover had taken advantage of the errors of the Stuarts. Montesquieu brought back from England his enthusiastic admiration of freedom and constitutional monarchy; Voltaire partly derived his scepticism from the English philosophers; Madame du Chatelet's object was science. As a woman she could spread her predilections with greater ease than the most gifted men. Fashion then ruled everything: scepticism itself would not have suc-

ceeded if it had not been fashionable. The influence of Madame du Chatelet with regard to the admiration of England, and all that was English, is not therefore to be slighted. This admiration of a foreign country soon became a powerful means of opposition at home with the philosophic party. When women had lent their aid to this feeling, it became omnipotent. The supreme bon ton henceforth was to affect English manners at court, and Prussian discipline in the army. This apparently anti-national movement was pregnant with a great truth: France looked up to foreign nations for her model, because she saw in herself nothing to admire or venerate.

The influence which Madame du Chatelet exercised in this respect was not felt so much during her lifetime as after her death. Her name was then no slight authority for those who maintained the superiority of everything English over French.

We have now done with this remarkable woman: for such, with all her errors, she undoubtedly was, if we judge her, as we are in fairness bound to do, after the standard of her own times. Judged by that standard, she will not soon be forgotten. Madame du Chatelet is now chiefly remembered for her devotedness to science: her labours have indeed been far outstripped, and, if her works are still known, they are probably no longer read; but science, like all that is intellectual and great, ennobles those who once toiled in her cause. Even though they should have effected but little, and though that little should be useless now, yet, whilst it is known that in their day they added their mite to the great store of universal knowledge, their names will be long and gratefully remembered.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHERS—LITERARY SOCIETIES—MADAME D'ENNAY—ROUSSEAU.

From the learned retirement of Cirey we must now return to the Parisian world. The philosophic party had there made rapid strides since the days of Madame de Tencin and Madame de la Popelinière. Fortune's doors were now opened to them on every side.

The history of French philosophy during the eighteenth century is, in reality, the history of that century itself. Reverses in war, disadvantageous peace, confusion and misery at home, successively marked the sway of Louis XV. The political personages of those times were the favourites of the Pompadours and the Du Barrys. But for the intellectual action of the nation itself, a more insignificant and disgraceful reign could not be found in the annals of France.

Without determining the merits or demerits of this philosophy, it cannot but be considered as the completion of a great intellectual movement, in progress since the reformation. Almost every century is characterised by a spirit of agitation, indicating an advance in the human mind with regard to the intellectual or to the social condition of man. Thus, during the sixteenth century, France was convulsed by the great Catholic league; which, whilst opposing heresy, was in reality a protest against power, and in favour of the national institutions. In this respect it strongly resembled the revolutionary spirit of England in the seventeenth century, when religious dissensions led to the triumph of civil freedom. This struggle was continued in France during the following century, by the political intrigues of the Fronde, and the persistency of

Jansenism; through which forms the decaying nobility and the partisans of intellectual freedom vainly opposed the personal tyranny of the monarch.

The philosophy of the eighteenth century took a bolder and more certain aim. Instead of making creed the means of attack, it attacked creed itself, as the very basis of authority. Philosophy, which had previously been linked with religion now became its irreconcilable foe. Ideas replaced creeds and doctrines. The privileged classes themselves hastened the crisis. Nobles, authors, men of science, and women of the world, all united in the common task of destruction: the whole nation seemed to have gathered up its strength in order to bring down the old and tottering social edifice. The revolution was the close of that eventful drama, which had been progressing through three centuries, always in spite of the persevering opposition of the reigning sovereigns. Moral death and fearful ruin seemed the only result of this wide devastation; but from these ruins of feudalism and absolute power sprang forth a nation. Before examining the influence which women possessed over this movement we must speak of the philosophy, which was one of its most important signs.

We shall do so as briefly as possible. To the spiritualism of Descartes and Leibnitz succeeded the doctrines of Locke, which were introduced into France towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. The soul ceased to occupy the attention of metaphysicians: they concluded it to lie beyond their province, and asserted that all our ideas and impressions are derived from the senses. Condillac, by his admirable clearness, popularised these doctrines. The ease with which they were understood, and their correspondence with the feelings of the age, rendered them still more universal. Sensation was the test to which men submitted faith and morality. The existence of God, of the soul, and of a future state, was no longer confessed. Some, indeed, still clung to these great principles; but their number was extremely limited. The laxity of morals favoured, and perhaps created, this gross materialism. This is more probable than the assertion that

these doctrines led to the general profligacy. Creeds are oftener fashioned according to our actions, than our actions are derived from creeds. It was natural that those who only lived for voluptuous enjoyments should seek, in a sensual philosophy, the justification of their conduct. Literature and philosophy are not always the guides of the age in which they flourish. They express the feelings of men, but do not sway them exclusively. Like constitutional monarchs, they reign but do not govern. Too much of unmixed condemnation has therefore been thrown on the French philosophers: they only followed the general current, and interpreted the opinions of their age; but because they acted as the organs of public feeling, they were assumed to be its leaders.

Whilst Condillac laid bare the springs of analytic philosophy, Helvetius expounded its moral tendencies in his "De l'Esprit," a work more famous than read. It is said that the wish of explaining to a lady a chapter of Locke, which she did not understand, made Helvetius begin this laborious work. His whole life was a proof of the power of female opinion. The wish of pleasing women, and winning the distinction their approbation conferred, first drew him from the voluptuous obscurity for which he was naturally fitted. After learning how to dance better than the famous Dupré, whom he is said to have occasionally replaced at the opera, Helvetius gave himself up to fencing. On beholding Maupertuis surrounded by a crowd of fashionable ladies in the Tuileries, he resolved to study geometry. Not satisfied with his progress in this science, and dazzled by the glory of Voltaire, he wrote a long dull poem on happiness. The success of Montesquieu's "Esprit des Lois" acted more powerfully still on his ambition. Resigning his post of farmer-general, he married, and retired into the country, where he spent ten years in writing his philosophical work. In this pernicious production Helvetius embodied all the doctrines of the philosophers in whose intercourse he had lived, reducing to a system the conversations of his friends. This he did with so much grossness, that the philosophers themselves were revolted; but, the religious

party having foolishly persecuted him, his friends were compelled to defend him through mere esprit de corps, and they thus gave him a celebrity he would never have enjoyed otherwise. Helvetius was disappointed and terrified. He was timid by nature, and believing himself surrounded with dangers, he retracted, in the most humiliating terms, the doctrines he had professed in his work, neither pacifying the devout party nor securing the approbation of the philosophers by his conduct.

The work of Helvetius was not the worst of its class. La Mettrie far surpassed him in the licentiousness and impiety of his productions. It was said of him by the atheistical Marquis d'Argens, "that he preached the theory of sin with the shamelessness of a fool." La Mettrie was bitterly persecuted in France and in Holland, but he found a refuge in Berlin, where Frederick II. kept him till his death. Schlosser, the German historian, thus speaks of the success his productions obtained :—"The works of this dissolute and sensual reviler of every serious principle, and of every higher effort, which perhaps no one in our times would notice, found a rapid sale in that dark age, because he directed his attention to the public, who took delight in scandal and sensuality. He compiled and mutilated the works of other persons, abused Haller and Boerhaave, and filled his writings to loathing with the comfortless doctrines of sin; which he announced and propagated with a vehemence approaching to madness: notwithstanding all this, they were collected twice after his death, and were read with eagerness and curiosity by the higher classes; for, at that time, and on many grounds, such works never came into the hands of the lower."

Such facts are deeply significant. To judge of the spirit of an age merely by the eminent men it has produced and admired, is, generally speaking, to judge erroneously. Genius is of all time, and borrows comparatively little evil from its own epoch: that little is modified by originality, and softened down by taste. But mediocrity, having less resources in itself, is compelled, in order to insure success, to draw largely

on the passions and prejudices of contemporary readers. If we wish to see how far these feelings may be carried; into what excesses they may lead a commonplace mind—which is always the best representative of a certain epoch; for genius is by its nature exceptional—it is only necessary to open some now forgotten but then admired production. It is thus in every age; and thus it was in the eighteenth century. Never was second-rate literature so licentious and debased, because never perhaps was the higher literature less poetical and noble. According to the testimony of an author, not suspected of severity, Collé and Crébillon the younger were chaste writers in comparison with most of the novelists of the times. The works of these novelists were, however, read and admired; for, whilst they ministered to a corrupt taste, they did not fail to assume the philosophic tone which insured their success, and then pervaded everything: in this case a revolting union. The evil of such productions does not rest wholly with the philosophers. The different classes of society were then all equally degraded and corrupt. The bourgeois and the nobles, the philosophers and their antagonists, all shared in the general laxity of morals of the age. It was not, indeed, by austerity that the philosophers sought to propagate their doctrines. Christianity had established the spiritual equality of man, by calling all to share in a glorious immortality; the philosophers of the eighteenth century founded the same equality on the degradations of humanity. All were equal, because all were equally corrupt.

It is sad to confess, but it is nevertheless true, that women did little to purify society from this general degradation. They shared in it, and may almost be said to have made it worse, since they authorised it by their example. A few women, indeed, were to be found, even amongst the aristocracy, who calmly adhered to the simple virtues of Christianity, in spite of all the philosophical arguments to the contrary; but they lived unheeded, and passed away forgotten. None but the brilliant friends of the philosophers could hope for

that reputation of talent and wit which was then the universal object of female envy.

But who, it will perhaps be asked, were those philosophers? How came they to exercise so much power? The philosophers were dissolute financiers who gave dinners to men of letters; they were writers with or without talent, who had attacked morals and revelation. Amateurs who had nothing better to do were philosophers. Women, bishops, courtiers, and ministers, philosophised like the rest. Philosophy, in short, had become the spirit of the nation; and in this lay the secret of its power. Everything betrayed the inroads it had made. The word Nature had superseded the holy name of God; priests in the pulpit spoke not of Jesus Christ, but of "the Legislator of the Christians." Men and women of rank attacked the privileges of their order, and spoke contemptuously of the Middle Ages, to which they owed their wealth and power. The nobles still possessed their false honour, which consists in never shrinking from danger, and never allowing an insult to pass unrevenged; but this feeling was one they had always considered exclusively their own, and they now rashly endeavoured to destroy the religious morality which even their own haughty code granted to the sons of the serfs.

Many of the philosophers were, doubtless, better than the principles they professed; and if they too often considered pleasure the great end of man, yet they certainly gave the name of pleasure to what every creed calls virtue. But when doctrines or institutions are concerned, nothing should be considered so much as the principle on which they are based; for it is that alone which can be really said to survive. The philosophers did not trouble themselves with such considerations. Intoxicated by the general applause, they assumed a vain and arrogant tone. Their scepticism being scarcely contradicted, had soon all the intolerance which naturally belongs to fashion. The extravagant praises of Frederick of Prussia and of the Empress Catherine, raised their vanity still more. Frederick, indeed, soon quarrelled with his protégés, and

shewed them that, in reality, he had no wish to place power and intellect on a level; but the mischief was done, and there were few things in heaven or earth which escaped the philosophic sway. The most modest contented themselves with teaching monarchs their high duties through means of dull philosophic romances, like Marmontel's "Bélisaire." Instead of considering themselves the creatures of the age, they candidly thought they had called into existence the very feelings which they themselves obeyed, and without which they would never have been known, save as literary men of little originality and ordinary talents. The high esteem in which they were held by the ladies who ruled over the Parisian world, and who would have thought their societies incomplete without the presence of at least one philosopher, heightened this feeling. They began to respect their own inspirations, and to consider all opposition to them as the result of fanaticism and tyranny. They mistook the selfish human wish of governing despotically for a holy zeal in the cause of humanity; and few mistakes are so fatal as those into which men fall with regard to their real motives of action.

The leaders of this party were often more moderate and clear-sighted than their disciples, whose imprudence they sought to repress; but such attempts were effectually checked by the murmurs they created. The philosophic chiefs naturally relinquished a repressive course foreign to their own inclinations, and which could only endanger their popularity. The control which government sought to exercise was useless: it was often insincere. Every one confessed the existence of radical evils; a few threw the whole blame on the philosophers, and thought to cure the disease by checking its external symptoms. But government had actually no arms with which to contend against opponents supported by public opinion. It was natural that society should favour doctrines which taught people to despise a state of things it was no longer possible to respect.

It was this consciousness of their strength which rendered the philosophers so intolerant. No opinions but those they

professed could obtain a fair hearing. Their social tyranny was such that many men of talent—but not gifted with sufficient independence of mind—did not dare to acknowledge their religious sentiments, and professed an atheistical creed foreign to their real belief. Naigeon, the atheist, was called by his own friends "L'Athée Inquisiteur," on account of his excessive intolerance. The moderate Duclos proposed to extirpate Protestantism, which he considered a political evil, by depriving the Protestants of their civil rights, and interdicting the public exercise of their worship. He seemed to consider this a humane and liberal suggestion. It is unjust to lay to the clergy and the Jesuits the sole odium of the intolerance which then prevailed. Intolerance is an attribute of the human mind, and not of any particular creed or opinion.

The great facility with which the name of philosopher was acquired increased the tribe. Vanity made more proselytes than conviction. The heathen philosophers were men who distinguished themselves from the crowd either by their doctrines or by their mode of life; the French philosophers, on the contrary, had nothing so peculiar as their similarity to the world with which they lived, and whose opinions and prejudices they fully adopted. The influence which women exercised over the doctrines of the philosophers was more in the form which those doctrines took than in their substance. Women have feelings, but seldom opinions of their own. To the philosophy of the eighteenth century they imparted some of their own thoughtless frivolousness, with a passion and enthusiasm, and consequently an impulsive power, it could not have possessed otherwise. No great movement, intellectual or political, in which the women did not share, could then have succeeded in France. By enlisting the sympathies of these powerful auxiliaries in their cause, the philosophers knew that they insured ultimate success; inclination and policy led them to adopt the complaisant and subservient tone with which they have been so bitterly reproached. The women of these times also greatly contributed to widen that

separation between the court and Parisian society which had begun under the ministry of Fleury.

This was especially apparent in the altered tone of the stage. Under Louis XIV. the decisions of the court in theatrical matters preceded those of the public. The reverse was the case in the eighteenth century, when the public gave a decidedly democratic direction to the popular plays. This philosophic and declamatory tone was modified by female influence: the women inspired the desire of something more true and more touching than could be afforded by the stately misfortunes of royal sufferers. The sentimental comedy, "comédie larmoyante," as its antagonists named it, succeeded to the royal tragedy of Louis XIV. A woman was the first who discovered this change in the taste of the public. Mademoiselle Quinault, one of the popular actresses of the day, and a woman of great originality and talent, advised Voltaire to create a mixed sort of drama. He laughed at her advice; which was, however, followed by La Chaussée. The great success his sentimental comedies obtained shewed the correctness of Mademoiselle Quinault's surmise. Voltaire endeavoured to eclipse him, but failed in the attempt: a fact which proves how very far he was from leading the taste of the age.

The increasing power of women was chiefly displayed by the patronage they extended towards the philosophers who frequented their bureaux d'esprits. They were not, however, the only supports of the philosophic party. M. de la Popelinière, and the farmer-general, Le Pelletier, received the artists and literary men of the times. Helvetius and D'Holbach, themselves philosophers, forwarded their cause, and acquired some celebrity—apart from their own personal merits—by giving costly entertainments to their friends. Helvetius gave dinners because he wanted ideas: he never spoke himself, or he at least spoke very little; his object was to create discussions in which he took no share. He listened to his guests, and noted in his mind all the striking and original remarks uttered in the heat of the moment. The dinners of

Helvetius proved attractive from the variety of eminent persons who were anxious to see the author of "De l'Esprit;" but the want of a presiding spirit was always sure to be felt.

The entertainments of the German baron D'Holbach were more interesting. For twenty-five years he drew around him the most celebrated atheists of the times, and spent large sums to forward their doctrines. Diderot, who converted him to atheism, the impatient Duclos, Helvetius, Saint-Lambert, Grimm, Marmontel, and, for a short time, Rousseau, La Harpe, D'Alembert, Morellet, Raynal, and the little Abbé Galiani, were successively the chief supports of the Epicurean baron's society. The objects of their indiscriminate attacks,—and they met for no other purpose than to attack,—were religion and authority. The best means of carrying their aim into effect were fully discussed at table, and in the presence of the servants, who transmitted their subversive doctrines to the lower classes. The so-called philosophers aimed, however, at nothing so definite as a revolution; but they felt that their task was to destroy, and accomplished it with fanatic zeal. D'Holbach himself spared neither his time nor his money in order to propagate his doctrines. His vast learning rendered him no contemptible opponent. No less than one hundred and forty-seven anonymous productions of infidel tendency are supposed to have been written under his direction, and printed at his expense. Voltaire, for persisting to believe in the existence of a God, was little respected by this coterie, and those who based their faith on its decisions. "C'est un bigot: il est déiste," was the petulant exclamation of a lady who had adopted D'Holbach's atheism. But, though openly maintained, atheism was not exclusively professed in this circle. Whilst Diderot and his host asserted their principles in the most absolute manner, Morellet, Rousseau, and a few more, declared themselves theists, and warmly defended their opinions. The versatile and unprincipled Abbé Galiani shewed his skill as an improvisatore by one day speaking in favour of the existence of a Supreme Being, and attacking the same principle on their next meeting. With such blasphemous

levity did these men treat a question so great and so momentous. Disgusted with the manner in which they professed their doctrines, Duclos once impatiently exclaimed—"That band of little impious fellows will end by making me go to confession." D'Alembert ended by wholly withdrawing from them.

The influence of this coterie of atheists over the eighteenth century was very great. They succeeded in popularising their desolating doctrines, and in extending the sway of atheism. The power of D'Holbach differed, however, very essentially from that of the women of his time: he had to toil assiduously for his popularity; and when, through motives of economy, he reduced his good cheer, he had the mortification of being deserted by some of his most influential friends. He was, indeed, as Galiani very freely and impertinently observed, the "maître d'hôtel of philosophy." With all his learning, he could never rise above commonplace talent; nor was his personal character very attractive. Vain, capricious, and selfish, he once boasted that, "though he had lived all his life with irritable and indigent men of letters, he could not recollect that he had either quarrelled with, or done the smallest service to any of them." The phlegmatic baron was, nevertheless, an honest man; but it is easy to conceive that his dinners, however excellent, lacked the charm of variety, and that liveliness which was the chief characteristic of female society. His dull and learned atheism did not suit every taste: the philosophers, accordingly, ate his dinners, but preferred the intercourse of a few talented women, who neither assumed D'Holbach's dogmatic tone nor exercised over the opinions of their guests the intolerance to which he was too much prone.

Besides the three famous bureaux d'esprit, to which we shall presently allude, there were several less formal societies, presided over by ladies who received their philosophic friends, but who did not make this their sole occupation. One of those ladies was a clever Englishwoman, Mrs Edward Montague, who defended the genius of Shakspeare against the

sarcasms of Voltaire, and who opened her house to the aristocratic and intellectual portion of French society. She eclipsed the farmers-general by the magnificence of her style of living; and acquired a considerable degree of importance by her discussions with Voltaire in France and Johnson in England.

Mademoiselle Quinault, the actress, also gathered a little coterie of free-thinking noblemen and celebrated authors around her. Her friends, with a doubtful sort of flattery, called her "the Ninon of the eighteenth century." Her suppers were excellent, and her manners very free: a few titled ladies, who could not resist the temptation of coming to those suppers, might occasionally be seen amongst her guests; but they avoided acknowledging in public this breach of the *convenances*.

Voltaire's favourite niece, Madame Denis, an ugly, agreeable woman, who wrote tragedies she could never get acted, likewise gave a few pleasant suppers to her friends. Voltaire was glad to join them, whenever he could escape from the jealous surveillance of Madame du Chatelet.

The society of Madame d'Epinay was still more important. Without being very clever or very handsome, Madame d'Epinay was an attractive woman. She never had a regular bureau d'esprit, which rendered her house more pleasant than it could otherwise have been. She established in her circle a philosophic ease and freedom, authorised by her secondary position in society. Authors, artists, men and women of the world, met there without restraint; and not for the sole and express purpose of philosophising and uttering clever paradoxes. Her society, indeed, was neither brilliant nor renowned: perhaps it was not very amusing, for Madame d'Epinay had little of what is called wit, and still less originality; but it was at least free and natural. Whilst they were in her house, her guests consented to doff that philosophic armour, through which posterity has found it so difficult to discern their real features. Madame d'Epinay abstained from exercising over her friends a control for which she was little adapted. She possessed judgment and penetration; but she had no imagination, no

originality, and very little taste. She derived pleasure from the intercourse of clever people, but she could not afford them much entertainment herself: her conversation was cold and somewhat commonplace; she yielded almost instinctively to the opinions of those in whose intimacy she lived; she was caustic with Grimm and sentimental with Rousseau: she would not have been either one or the other if left to her own impulses. The same traits characterised her writings; for, though gifted with very little imagination, Madame d'Epinay was always engaged in some literary labour. Whenever she attempted high composition she failed; but her epistolary style was good, and she excelled in easy gossiping narrative. It was less design than accident which procured Madame d'Epinay her philosophic connexions. Her lover, Francœil, was one of the early patrons of J. J. Rousseau, whom he introduced to her; and Rousseau, in his turn, made her become acquainted with Diderot, D'Holbach, and Grimm. M. d'Epinay, a wealthy and dissolute financier, had, as usual, nothing to do with the connexions of his wife. But he, at least, may be said to have deserved his fate. Diderot, with equal truth and severity, observed of him, "that he had squandered two millions without uttering one criticism or performing one good action."

Madame d'Epinay seems to have been naturally inclined to virtue, but the example of her husband had a pernicious influence on her character. Disgusted with the vices of M. d'Epinay, she formed an attachment for M. de Francœil, with whose friends she was soon on intimate terms. The social position of Madame d'Epinay not being very high, she had more external freedom than was enjoyed by the ladies of rank. Her own conduct, and the profligacy of her husband, rendered her still more independent of the opinion of the world. She made, therefore, no scruple of receiving men whom the upper circles still eschewed, and was soon intimate with all the leaders of the philosophic sect. Diderot, however, she could not secure; he was always ill at ease in the polite world. Too great a portion of his life had been spent in very questionable society for him to acquire the aristocratic elegance which distinguished

Voltaire. This was, perhaps, why, with all his fervid eloquence, Diderot often failed in producing the effect which might have been anticipated from his great talents. His mind was too vast and his manner too vehement for the artificial society in which he was compelled to move. His friends said that he should have been a Grecian philosopher, teaching his disciples in the gardens of Academia. Diderot himself thought so, and was proud of the appellation of Socrates-Diderot, even whilst he ministered, with licentious productions, to the depraved taste of the age. He presented the not uncommon phenomenon of a man whose mind was superior to his writings; thus his works are no longer read, whilst his name still stands foremost amongst the names of that period.

It was the caustic German, Grimm, the successor of Francœil in Madame d'Epinay's affections, who held the most conspicuous place in her circle; where his despotic disposition, and his habit of covering his face with a coating of red and white paint, caused him to be familiarly named "Tyran le Blanc." The lively little Abbé Galiani also stood high in Madame d'Epinay's good graces. They wrote one another clever letters, full of smart sayings, and destined to be inserted in Grimm's correspondence with his German patron. How far, moreover, these letters may be considered confidential, and relied upon as such, can be seen by Madame d'Epinay's remark, in answer to an observation of Galiani's: "It is insupportable of you to remind me that our correspondence will be printed after our death. *I knew it;* but had forgotten all about it. Immortality terrifies me dreadfully." What a pity that all the correspondences of those times bear traces of the same knowledge; that letters were not then written off merely for the look of a friend, but were leisurely indited with an eye to posterity, and a very natural wish of appearing to advantage before this severe and impartial judge!

A few foreigners of distinction, the most eminent of whom was Hume, also made their appearance in the circle of Madame d'Epinay. Hume then enjoyed in the Parisian circles so high a degree of reputation, that a lady was disgraced at court for

having asked who and what he was. He was a philosopher and an Englishman; he appeared at a period when French society and the ladies who presided over it felt the want of some attractive novelty; it was natural that Hume should be exalted as a prodigy, and eagerly sought as such in every fashionable circle. He was at first thought admirably adapted to enact his part in the frivolous amusements then in fashion; but, though once placed in the character of a sultan between two of the prettiest women of the day, the English philosopher, after much rumination, and repeatedly striking his breast, found nothing better to say, during a whole quarter of an hour, than: "*Eh bien! mes demoiselles. Eh bien! vous voilà, donc. Eh bien! vous violà . . vous voilà ici.*" Hume's reputation was fortunately too well established to suffer from what would have ruined another man. He was still cajoled and caressed in every Parisian circle; where he received, with philosophic phlegm and gravity, the lavish praise of his admirers. Madame d'Epinay, without admiring exclusively the "gros et grande historiographe d'Angleterre," and whilst complaining that his conduct lowered the philosophic dignity, was not sorry to display him to her friends.

Many individuals of secondary note also adorned her circle; the frank Duclos and the elegant Saint-Lambert were amongst her intimate friends, as well as an obscure and needy author, whom one of her female acquaintances cavalierly described as "a poor fellow, as poor as Job, a sort of dependant on Madame Dupin, Francœil's mother, but full of wit and vanity." This individual was no other than *a* M. J. J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, the scarcely known author of a comedy entitled "L'Engagement Téméraire," and which had been acted by Madame d'Epinay and her friends at her country house.

This was not the first appearance which the still obscure Rousseau had made in Parisian society. Whilst he was devoting his whole attention to music, he was seen for a while in the salons of Madame de la Popelinière, to whom he submitted his opera of the "Muses Galantes." Madame de la Popelinière was then wholly in favour of the composer Rameau.

She took little heed of the awkward and independent Genevese, but criticised the "Muses Galantes" very bitterly, and gave their author several tokens of her ill-will. Rousseau was as unsuccessful in other quarters, until his essay on "Civilisation" revealed his genius to the world: henceforth he was universally courted and admired; but by remaining so long beyond the pale of what was called elegant society, he had learned to know and despise its judgments: he too might have exclaimed—

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me."

The destiny of Rousseau seemed to mark him out for the apostle of democracy. Exposed as a plebeian to all the proud man's contumely; humbled and oppressed when he mingled with the world; scorned and forgotten when he retired to solitude, the proud and irritable genius garnered up in his heart, through years of unheeded sufferings, that unconquerable hatred of society which he afterwards expressed with an eloquence so bitter and so deep. When in the noonday of his fame he was called forth from his obscurity, he looked upon the world, which had so long excluded him from its precincts, with mingled disdain and abhorrence; and, turning away, he resumed once more that deep and incessant self-communion, the bliss and misery of his whole life. Rousseau was not immaculate; but at least he felt in his soul a thirst for an ideal excellence of which he met no trace elsewhere. He fell into the common error of mistaking his aspirations for virtues. He has been called vain, and there are strange traces of self-idolatry throughout the whole of his erring life: but was it himself that Rousseau worshipped, or the good he believed he saw in his own heart? If he was selfish and vain, he was not exclusively such; else, whence came the passion and fervour of his doctrines, the magic eloquence and tenderness of his style, which could rouse even the whole mass of a corrupt and decaying society? When did a heart, unmoved itself, stir others so deeply?

It was natural that Rousseau should not sympathise with

the philosophers. They only aimed at destruction; he wished to destroy in order to create anew: their inspirations were all derived from the external and social world, which they obeyed; his were essentially internal and independent. Thus, whilst Voltaire owed his fame to the pliancy with which he yielded to the feelings of the age, Rousseau won his by the vehemence with which he attacked those feelings. Society avenged itself personally upon him, even whilst it admired and exalted his genius; but it had not sufficient faith in its own vitality to feel injured. All knew that a great social change was at hand, and hailed the prophetic voice by which it was announced.

Rousseau had not yet wholly broken with the world when he contracted for Madame d'Epinay a friendship, which, though very ardent at first, was as unfortunate as his other attachments. It is well known that Rousseau's unhappy temper would never let him agree long with his friends of either sex. He passionately loved the society of women—it was to his intercourse with them that Diderot partly ascribed the grace and fervour of his style—but he did little to conciliate their favour; though he knew, from the first, "that nothing could be done in Paris without the aid of women." He absolutely refused to submit to the patronising tone they were in the habit of using towards the philosophers: nor were his quarrels with his fair friends marked by much amenity of tone or feeling on his part. His connexion with Madame d'Epinay was particularly unfortunate. The passionate love he expressed for nature and solitude induced Madame d'Epinay, in the first enthusiasm of her friendship, to fit him up a romantic little hermitage at Montmorency, and in the neighbourhood of her own residence. Rousseau was extremely unhappy in this retreat; he complained that his friends deserted him, and accused Grimm of seeking to deprive him of the friendship of Diderot, D'Holbach, and Madame d'Epinay. To add to his misfortunes, he fell desperately in love with Madame d'Houdetot, Madame d'Epinay's sister-in-law, and the mistress of Saint-Lambert; whom his adventure

with Madame du Chatelet had brought into notice in Parisian society. Rousseau was then composing his "Nouvelle Héloïse," and he read the letters, as he finished them, to Madame d'Epinay and Madame d'Houdetot. Though this latter lady was, as Rousseau avers, the only woman he ever loved, she could boast of little beauty: she squinted, and was marked with the small-pox. But she was gay, frank, and thoughtless, and, according to all accounts, witty and very charming: her friends called her the "parfaite Julie." Rousseau's love was hopeless; for Madame d'Houdetot was ardently attached to Saint-Lambert, to whom she always remained constant. Her husband, as usual, raised no obstacle to her passion: he and Saint-Lambert agreed very well until their old age, when they became extremely jealous of one another, and led Madame d'Houdetot a very uneasy life.

Rousseau was soon thoroughly miserable in his hermitage: he accused Diderot of deserting him, and Madame d'Epinay of being in a league with his enemies. After vainly attempting to sow division between Madame d'Houdetot and Saint-Lambert, he ended by turning on Madame d'Epinay with a singular degree of acrimony. They parted with mutual feelings of ill-will; and this disagreement was the origin of Rousseau's long quarrel with the whole philosophic party. For some time, Paris talked of nothing else. Rousseau's discussions with Diderot were especially the theme of conversation. "This is really incredible," exclaimed M. de Castries: "one can hear of nothing but those people who have no position, no house of their own, and who actually live in garrets." In spite of D'Holbach's warning, Hume took Rousseau's part, and brought him to England. Rousseau, more gloomy and misanthropic than ever, soon accused his host of conspiring against his peace and honour, and indulged in such bitter personalities, that Hume, exasperated, wrote off to D'Holbach—"You were right: Rousseau is a monster." This letter was publicly read by D'Holbach, and brought down much opprobrium on Rousseau. Walpole, who was then in Paris, thought this a fit opportunity to address

Rousseau a very impertinent and insulting letter, in which he assumed the name of Frederick of Prussia. Madame du Deffand was asserted to have revised this letter for her friend. Rousseau resented this very much. One of his most bitter complaints against Hume and Walpole was, that they had drawn all the women away from him; and this circumstance, which was correct in the main, contributed no little to the social persecutions Rousseau henceforth endured.

After his quarrel with Madame d'Epinay, Rousseau appears indeed to have broken entirely with the Parisian world, and the ladies who ruled over it. Madame d'Epinay, who was wholly influenced by Grimm, and whom Rousseau's caprices had heartily wearied, did not regret the loss of her former friend: it is, however, to her connexion with him that she owed the interest attached to her name, and the attention she excited in her own times.

When Rousseau had left the hermitage, and when his quarrel with her was no longer thought of, Madame d'Epinay found herself comparatively forgotten. In her latter days, she wrote works on education, and became the rival of Madame de Genlis; but her talent always remained essentially commonplace.

Rousseau speaks of her with singular bitterness, and evidently with injustice. She was kind-hearted, and would have remained his friend, had he allowed her to do so. But to agree with any one was not his destiny, or rather, in his nature; he accused Madame d'Epinay of being in a league against him with the philosophers, and left her in order to brood over his imaginary wrongs: "a lonely man; his life a long soliloquy!"*

* Carlyle.

CHAPTER V.

GENERAL ASPECT OF SOCIETY—POWER OF WOMAN—MADAME DU DEFFAND.

We have already stated that the society of Madame d'Epinay was secondary in importance to the bureaux d'esprit so celebrated in the history of the eighteenth century. Three of those assemblies—and the three most important—were then presided over by Madame du Deffand, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and Madame Geoffrin. The first of these ladies was celebrated for her caustic wit; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse for the charms of her conversation; and Madame Geoffrin for her active benevolence.

The existence of these literary societies is a characteristic feature of the times. Montesquieu, covertly alluding to their influence, satirically observes, that a nation where women give the prevailing tone must necessarily be talkative. Then, however, it was the men who talked, and the women who listened. The men talked because they could do little else; women gave the prevailing tone, because men of all classes were partly compelled, and partly willing, to gather around them. The nobles being excluded from politics—in which none but the ministers and their creatures could interfere—exercising no control, either as individuals or as a body, naturally gave themselves up to the pleasures of society. Their political insignificance thus increased the power and importance of women.

The society of women was also sought by authors and scientific men, because there was no other freedom than the social freedom protected by them. Those opinions which, if published openly, would have drawn down persecution on

those men by whom they were asserted, could be professed without fear in a drawing-room. The individuals who, nevertheless, ventured on the publication of these principles, were not the less anxious for this to appear in the bureaux d'esprit. They were animated by that stirring and communicative impulse which characterises epochs of intellectual action. Though the philosophers overrated the value of their labours—since they destroyed where it was their duty to investigate, and, the department of science excepted, left nothing save ruins behind them—a great change was, nevertheless, effected in their own opinions, and in those of their contemporaries. They all cast away the old creeds and institutions of society. Such workings do not pass silently in the human mind: whether they lead to good or to evil, the first irresistible impulse of man is to impart them to other human beings.

To this powerful motive for courting female society may be added the consciousness that the women who then presided over literary circles not only named whom they liked to the Academy, but dispensed as they chose influence and reputation. Thomas, the author, suffered in his fame for not having known how to conciliate the women of his time. The indolence of the upper classes, the general want of freedom, and the vanity and ambition of authors, thus laid the basis of the power of women—a power then carried to an extent now scarcely suspected.

It is both ludicrous and contemptible to read, in contemporary memoirs, of the arts then employed to secure the favour of those despotic rulers of society. Even men of high rank, like the Prince of Condé, felt convinced that nothing could be effected without the assistance of women; and, acknowledging only one method of securing this assistance, professed themselves the admirers of every handsome and clever woman who seemed likely to further their views. Those whose personal disadvantages did not allow them to act this part, were satisfied with the more humble rank of confidential friend. Almost every woman of fashion had in her train one of these confidants, who listened to the history

of her love affairs, kindly supposed them to be purely platonic, and whose task it was to administer consolation and advice. During the seventeenth century, weak-minded women were notorious for their partiality towards their religious directors. But, "autre temps, autre mœurs," and the descendants of the devotees of Louis XIV. now gave the empire, formerly usurped under the name of religion, to a very different feeling. Most of these singular *directeurs* owed their success in life to the zeal of their female friends: a fact which served to increase the species.

This political insignificance of the men placing the women on a level with them, also rendered the intercourse of the two sexes more polished and agreeable. They could speak on the same subjects, since there were no political discussions from which the women were to be excluded. Conversation was soon carried to the height of an art, though it was ever marked by the most elegant simplicity. It not only acquired a style, but also became remarkable for its perspicuity and concision. The necessity under which men laboured of explaining to the women with whom they conversed matters their ignorance prevented them from understanding, made them acquire a clearness and facility they often transferred to their writings. That excessive polish, which is both the beauty and the defect of the French language, is to be attributed to female influence. Women necessarily perfect the taste of a nation, and the wish of pleasing them introduces refinement and elegance. The assemblies over which they then presided were not free, however, from great disadvantages. One of their most serious evils was, that for the calm meditation of former writers they substituted the habit of quick and light decisions peculiar to conversation. Mingled presumption and frivolousness thus became one of the characteristics of the times.

It would be erroneous to conclude, from what has been said of the general profligacy which then prevailed, that the conversation of men and women who owned few moral restraints, was marked by indelicacy. Never, on the contrary, was con-

versation more free from this blemish, and even from scandal. One of the female oracles of those days had pronounced, "que cela gâtait le ton d'une femme," and she was in the right: scandal is essentially vulgar. Thus, the careless remark that M. *Un Tel* "had" Madame *Une Telle* was the only knowledge a stranger could obtain of an illicit connexion between persons who were notoriously on the most intimate terms. The least open freedom on the part of those persons would have excluded them for ever from society. Sin was tolerated, but the indecencies of sin were rigidly forbidden.

It is difficult to imagine that a society more polite, elegant, and intellectual than that of the eighteenth century should ever have existed; and this for the obvious reason that universal attention was directed towards the acquisition of those talents necessary to appear to advantage in society, as well as to render it more perfect and attractive. Many men and women of high talents sought not to establish their fame on anything like a durable basis: the great business of life was then to talk well, with grace, wit, and vivacity; everything else was sacrificed to the possession of this perishable accomplishment. Thus, the remarkable women of those times are now known only by hearsay; they left nothing by which they can be judged fairly: their productions, when they did write, do not come up to the idea formed of their talents. Having early sought to shine chiefly in conversation, they were no longer fitted for that peculiar train of thought necessary to literary composition. It is by their letters alone that we can now conceive the real tone of their minds. But for the correspondence of Madame du Deffand, what idea could we have of her keen and polished satire, and of that selfishness and ennui which literally consumed her existence? Were it not for the love-letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, first given to the public through the indiscretion of a friend, it would be impossible to understand correctly the originality and passionate fervour which distinguished this unhappy woman.

It is also a remarkable and interesting fact, that the

authoresses of those times were very commonplace women with little influence. Madame de Genlis had great talent and a wonderful industry; but she cannot, however, be said to have risen higher than this. Madame de Staël, who had genius, does not belong to the brilliant portion of the eighteenth century. She appeared when the spirit of the Revolution was already effacing the last vestiges of that selfish and corrupt society.

To judge of the intellect and influence of the women of those times, we must therefore consider them in their social relations, and often in their private affections. To judge of them otherwise would be to fall into inevitable errors. The personal characters of the three ladies whom we have mentioned as holding the bureaux d'esprit frequented by the whole philosophic tribe, will, even without straining after imaginary analogies, represent a few of the very distinct feelings which then divided French society. The polite, profligate, and sceptical noblesse naturally gathered around Madame du Deffand, a witty and aristocratic woman; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, a social outcast by her illegitimate birth, and gifted with an ardent and enthusiastic mind, sympathised with the political reformers of the day; the worldly-wise and moderate ones of the philosophic party met at the house of Madame Geoffrin, the quiet and prudent bourgeoise, who wished to reconcile her religious feelings with the patronage of professed sceptics. The society of Madame du Deffand is the first that must occupy our attention.

Frank without candour, and impetuous without either passions or feeling; full of wit and sound judgment in her mode of thinking, but extravagant and often ridiculous in her conduct; openly selfish, and yet capable of friendship: such was Madame du Deffand. During her youth she was known for her beauty, vivacity, and equivocal conduct. As age drew on, her charms vanished, and she became blind, ill-tempered, and ennuyée. She sought for a time a refuge in devotion, but having naturally little turn that way, she opened a bureau d'esprit to the philosophers. Neither their society

nor her own wit—which, after that of Voltaire and Piron, was perhaps the keenest of the age—could preserve her, however, from the incessant ennui that consumed her declining years.

Marie Vichy de Chamrond was born towards the close of the seventeenth century. In the convent where she was brought up, and where she received an excellent education, she early distinguished herself for a tone of raillery on religious matters, which alarmed the nuns. They called in Massillon to talk to her; but the good and amiable bishop was too much delighted with the grace and frankness of the young girl to be very severe. "Elle est charmante!" was his only reproof. At the age of twenty-two, Mademoiselle de Vichy was married to the Marquis du Deffand, from whom her intrigues soon caused her to separate. Eyes remarkable for their beauty and brilliancy, a pleasant smile, and a countenance full of piquancy and expression, were the chief personal attractions of the witty young marchioness. Amongst her numerous lovers were the regent, whom she fascinated for a whole fortnight; a M. de Formont, much esteemed by Voltaire; President Henault, and Pont de Veyle, the adopted brother of Mademoiselle Aïssé. The latter two remained constant to her until their dotage, and were supposed to stand equally well in her favour. Constancy in love was not one of Madame du Deffand's virtues.

Finding herself heart-free at one epoch of her life, she resolved to effect a reconciliation with her husband. She spared no seductions to win him back, but she had no sooner effected her object than the return of a lover by whom she had been abandoned made her repent her success. Not knowing how to get rid of M. du Deffand, she assumed so melancholy and woe-begone an aspect whenever he was present, that the poor man was glad to leave her once more. Her lover, who had persuaded her to act this part merely out of pique, now left her in his turn; and, as the details of the adventure were known over all Paris on the following day, the fickle Madame du Deffand became the scorn of the whole

town: blamed and forsaken by her most intimate friends, and obliged to associate with such women as Madame de Prie and Madame de Parabère.

After the failure of the Cellamare conspiracy, Madame du Deffand was restored to something like consideration by the friendship of Madame du Maine, who fully appreciated her keen lively wit. It was probably at the polished court of this princess, and in the intimacy of Madame de Staal, that Madame du Deffand acquired the exquisite style which afterwards characterised her writings. She was also indebted for this accomplishment to her own great care in writing. During the earlier portion of her life, she never sent a letter without having first written it three or four times over: another fact which proves how erroneous is the impression that the epistolary remains of those times were spontaneous effusions.

With both Madame du Maine and Madame de Staal, Madame du Deffand was a great favourite, as we can see from the lively amd amusing letters addressed to her by the companion of the duchess. Her degree of favour was, however, as variable as the temper of the capricious princess, according to the testimony of Madame de Staal, who thus writes to her friend:—"I read your letter before yesterday to her highness. She was in a fit of fear produced by the thunder. This did not tend to set off the polite things you said. I shall take care another time not to expose you to stormy weather. We were joyful for the last few days; now the rain is come again. Our ideas, which had become serene and pleasant, will resume all their gloom. Add to this, that for two days our princess has had a cold, accompanied with fever; notwithstanding which, and the abominable weather, the ceaseless promenade is not discontinued. Verily Providence seems to provide princes with bodies suited to all their fancies; they could never otherwise reach the age of reason."

The restlessness which induced Madame du Maine to pursue her out-door pleasures with as much zeal as if wind and rain did not exist, led her to surround herself by all the visitors she could procure: quantity far more than quality seems to

have been her object. She had made Madame du Deffand promise that she would spend some time at Sceaux, where an apartment was kept for her. But then Madame du Deffand was notoriously inconstant: if she broke her word, the apartment remained vacant, and a visitor—no matter whom—was irreparably lost to Madame du Maine. Madame de Staal, who had learned to read her princely mistress thoroughly, intimated as much to Madame du Deffand.

"The desire of being surrounded increases daily. I foresee that if you keep an apartment without occupying it there will be great regret for the loss you will cause, no matter what that loss may be. The great become so transparent that we can see the light through. It is an admirable study to contemplate them: I know nothing that brings us back more surely to philosophy."

The daughter of the regent, Mademoiselle de Valois, formerly mistress of Richelieu, now Duchess of Modena, came to Paris about this time. Madame du Deffand, who had known her in her youth, paid her a visit. On learning this, Madame du Maine, who would probably not have shed a tear at Madame du Deffand's death, manifested the greatest vexation and grief.

"Nothing," wrote Madame de Staal, "can equal the surprise and sorrow experienced on learning that you had been to see the Duchess of Modena. An impassioned and jealous lover bears the most suspicious steps more patiently than this was endured from you. You are going to devote yourself there, to abandon all else. One was then reserved to this fate, to be the example of every misery; the torments that seemed gone are going to be renewed through you; it is a most cruel destiny, &c. I said all that could be said to restore something like calmness, but I was not heeded. Although I have no right to be astonished at anything, this scene nevertheless found means to surprise me. Come, I conjure you, and reassure us against this alarm."

It was principally after the death of Madame de Staal and of Madame du Maine, that Madame du Deffand, who had

hitherto spent the greatest portion of her time at Sceaux, began to receive a few friends in her apartment in the convent of Saint Joseph, and gradually gathered around her a brilliant literary circle, which took its tone from her own sceptical and sarcastic spirit. But even before this epoch, Montesquieu, D'Alembert, Marmontel, the Maréchale de Luxembourg, Madame de Staal, the Duchess de la Vallière, Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet, the Chevalier D'Aydie, Pont de Veyle, Formont, and the President Henault, composed her habitual society. We have already stated that, before she assumed the tone of a femme philosophe, Madame du Deffand had several times endeavoured to become a devotee; but faith seemed antipathetic to her nature. Though she was very zealous in her first attempt at reformation, she did not scruple to declare, "that she should not honour *rouge* and President Henault—her lover *en titre*—so far as to discard them." The poor President, who feared her temper more than he loved her person, was very cavalierly treated by the capricious Madame du Deffand. Having ventured, in one of the letters he addressed to her during a temporary separation, to express a sentimental regret at her absence, she answered him in a tone of cool and cutting sarcasm, which effectually silenced such outpourings of his heart for the future. If Madame du Deffand was selfish and heartless, she had, at least, the merit of being perfectly frank about it. When the celebrated work of Helvetius appeared, several persons blamed him in her presence for having made selfishness the great motive of human actions. "Bah!" said she, "he has only revealed every one's secret."

Her failure as a devotee did not prevent Madame du Deffand from establishing herself in the convent of Saint Joseph, where she had a handsome apartment, and gave evening parties and suppers to her friends. She had not long been settled there, when she became totally blind; and she remained in this melancholy condition for the last thirty years of her life. Madame du Deffand bore her calamity with great fortitude, but it naturally added to the deep ennui which consumed her existence; and which, with her habitual frankness, she never

sought to disguise. "Give me a secret to ward off ennui," she observes, in one of her letters to D'Alembert, "and you will lay me under a greater obligation than if you had bestowed on me the philosopher's stone." This feeling was by no means peculiar to Madame du Deffand: the published correspondence of the circle over which she presided shews that, with all their wit and boasted philosophy, her friends found the burden of life intolerably heavy.

The ennui of Madame du Deffand was increased by a singular degree of heartlessness. She had intellectual predilections, but she could not love. The gaiety and vivacity of D'Alembert were acceptable to her; so were the originality and naïveté of Montesquieu, the polished wit of President Henault, or the satire of Voltaire; but she had little affection for them as individuals. This did not prevent her from being in many cases a sincere and zealous friend: though friendship was, with her, divested of all its charms. Of her deficiency in this respect, Madame du Deffand was well aware: when in the latter years of her life she became acquainted with Madame de Genlis, who was then bringing up, with her own children and those of the Duke of Orleans, a young English girl, named Pamela, (afterwards the wife of the unhappy Lord Fitzgerald,) she asked her, with evident surprise, "Are you so fond of that child?" "I am very fond of her indeed!" was the natural reply. "Ah! you are very happy," sighed Madame du Deffand; "I never could love anything." According, indeed, to the testimony of one who knew her well, "it was difficult to have less feeling and more selfishness."

Those persons who compared Madame du Deffand to Madame de Sévigné—and there were many who did so in her own circle—overlooked this trait in her character. Her wit was very brilliant, and her style no doubt was very pure; but was the great charm of Madame de Sévigné merely wit or style? Does not that charm consist rather in the admirable pathos and infinite variety with which she paints her deep and passionate attachment for her beloved daughter? Madame de

Sévigné had the keenest enjoyment of life, as is shewn by the very vehemence with which she deplores every trifling sorrow; the life of Madame du Deffand was one of tasteless ennui. If we except a few satirical sketches, admirably drawn, what is there in all her letters, that should make them be compared with those of Madame de Sévigné? This total insensibility not being accompanied by the affectation of a contrary feeling, did not prevent the society of Madame du Deffand from being eminently attractive. It was, indeed, impossible to resist the fascination of that brilliant, active intellect, which yielded to every impression, and passed from one subject to another, with ever new freshness and variety. In all matters connected with the everyday world—the only world the eighteenth century cared for—Madame du Deffand was inimitable. The soundness of her judgment, united to the poignancy and originality of her language, and that causticity which never forsook her, caused her society to be eagerly sought for and highly valued. Her freedom from the wish of seeking for effect, and her striking impartiality, were also very remarkable characteristics of Madame du Deffand's mind. At an epoch when simplicity was by no means prevalent, she displayed an unbending hatred of everything like subtlety and finesse, and unsparingly accused of affectation all the thinkers of the day. She had no more sympathy with the declamatory enthusiasm of the philosophers than with the rigorism of the devotees. She disbelieved in the existence of feelings she could never experience herself.

This general indifference prevented Madame du Deffand from surrounding herself exclusively with philosophers; consequently the society which met at her house was far more easy and polite, and more free from vanity and pedantry than it was customary for such assemblies to be.

It was probably this absence of all effort and restraint which made the frank and unaffected Montesquieu—who loved those houses where, to use his own expression, he could pass with his everyday wit—regret with so much sincerity the delightful suppers of the Convent of Saint Joseph. The

peculiar pleasure which he found in the society of his hostess he thus candidly expressed to the Chevalier d'Aydie, "I love this woman with all my heart; she pleases and amuses me: it is impossible to feel a moment's ennui in her company."

The feelings with which Madame du Deffand inspired her friends corresponded to the degree of pleasure she afforded them. But whilst she imparted amusement to others, she could not always receive it herself; and at those suppers, where all the strangers who visited Paris eagerly sought to be admitted, the listless countenance of the hostess often betrayed the ennui which pursued her even there. She did not even choose to disguise that ennui from those who unfortunately added to it. One of her friends, remarkable for the monotony of his delivery, was boring her one day with a long and uninteresting dissertation. "My dear friend," said she, taking advantage of her blindness to feign ignorance, "what tiresome book are you reading?" There was nothing, however, which Madame du Deffand dreaded so much as solitude, and in general she spared no effort to render her house attractive to her visitors. "Let us have good cheer," she often said to her cook, "I now want society more than ever." "Suppers," she also observed, "were one of the four great objects of man in life." Madame du Deffand did well, with all her wit, not to rely too exclusively on its effects. Abstemiousness was neither her virtue nor that of the sensual philosophers with whom she associated.

The society of Madame du Deffand's was neither literary, like Madame de Tencin's, nor artistic, like that of Madame de la Popelinière. It was the society of aristocratic and intellectual individuals, who met for common amusement, with a sprinkling of philosophers, in order to give some variety to conversation, and also because philosophy was the fashion of the day. The most ardent members of the philosophic sect had, however, little sympathy with the cold-hearted Madame du Deffand. She said herself, in her own quiet way, "Je n'ai pas d'atomes aurochans." Diderot came once to visit her, eyed her witty Epicurean friends with contempt, and never

came again. Freedom and good breeding were the chief characteristics of this circle. Within its narrow limits, however, Madame du Deffand set up for an arbitrary judge on all questions of philosophy or taste. Her correspondence with Voltaire, and the high value he set on her opinions, gave her great authority: though her decisions were marked by more wit than correctness. Of Montesquieu's great work, she observed that it was not L'Esprit des Lois, but De l'Esprit sur les Lois,—a saying which Voltaire thought sufficiently good to make his own and repeat. There was more truth in her remark already quoted on the work of Helvetius; for though it is false that selfishness is the only human incentive, the assertion was often correct with respect to the good society of that period.

Notwithstanding her intercourse with the philosophers, Madame du Deffand was too egotistical and ennuyée to favour the spirit of discussion by which they were animated. She was a sceptic chiefly because the trouble of inquiry was insupportable to her; and also because a sceptical indifference was natural to her mind: "Qu'elle aimait laisser flotter dans le vague," as she herself observed. Madame du Deffand was, moreover, of opinion that what cannot be known to us is evidently unnecessary: a remark which Voltaire pronounced admirable. "This is a great truth, madame; and what is better still, a very consoling one." However logical Madame du Deffand's reasoning may have been, its immediate tendency was to render her indifferent to all that did not concern her nearly. Willing as she was to enjoy the most entire freedom in her little philosophic parties, she strongly objected that her friends should betray her by exercising the same liberty publicly, and reproached them for the bitterness with which they assailed the existing order of things. It was characteristic of her selfish and indifferent temper to look exclusively to her own quietness, and, still more, to consider philosophy as an art which a few amateurs exercised for private amusement, and which was to lead to no further result.

When Horace Walpole first visited Madame du Deffand, and

began his celebrated connexion with her, he found her surrounded by the élite of the Parisian world of intellect and fashion. D'Alembert, indeed, had deserted his old friend for reasons which shall be specified hereafter, and Madame du Deffand sadly missed his mirth and boyish spirits; but she still enjoyed the company of many choice acquaintances, who amused her as much as she could be amused, whilst she languidly reclined in her arm-chair, making knots, the only occupation in which her blindness permitted her to engage. Pont de Veyle, grave and morose, but inimitable in parody, was there; so were the old and amiable Maréchale de Luxembourg; the flattering Madame de Mirepoix; the graceful and charming Duchess of Choiseul: her husband the minister,—"that little volatile being who gave but three seconds to any one body or thing," * and who preferred to his amiable wife his own sister, the clever, ambitious, haughty Duchess of Grammont—"a fierce Amazonian dame, who loved and hated arbitrarily, was universally detested," and whose memorable struggle with Madame du Barry worked the ruin of her brother.

The gossiping Englishman, as ennuyé as any of Madame du Deffand's guests, began by ridiculing this society, ungallantly terming the hostess "an old debauchée of wit;" but he gradually yielded to the universal fascination, and after confessing that "there was a *douceur* in the society of the women of fashion that captivated him," he wrote home the following lively account of the "old, blind, charming Madame du Deffand:"—"She is now very old, and stone blind; but retains all her vivacity, wit, memory, judgment, passions, and agreeableness. She goes to operas, plays, suppers, and Versailles; gives suppers twice a-week; has every new work read to her; makes new songs and epigrams, ay, admirably, and remembers every one that has been made these fourscore years. She corresponds with Voltaire, dictates charming letters to him, contradicts him, is no bigot to him or to anybody, and laughs both at the clergy and the philosophers."

* Walpole's Letters

As she grew older, Madame du Deffand's insensibility of feeling seemed to increase. Her conduct towards Pont de Veyle was heartless to the last degree. The authenticity of the dialogue,* said by Grimm to have passed between the two aged lovers, may be doubted; but her conduct towards him in his last illness is a matter of fact. On the evening of Pont de Veyle's death, she came to a large supper given by Madame de Marchais. As his demise was already known, the persons present condoled with her on the subject. "Alas!" was her feeling reply, "he died this evening at six o'clock; otherwise you would not see me here." And she supped with her usual appetite. This heartlessness might proceed from caprice, for whilst Madame du Deffand shewed so much indifference to the fate of poor Pont de Veyle, she was carrying on her correspondence with Walpole; for whom she had conceived a sort of passionate friendship, and who, when he visited Paris, ruled arbitrarily over her little circle: thus dispossessing President Henault of his ancient privileges.

This coterie of Madame du Deffand's may be considered as the best illustration of French society in the eighteenth century. Unlike the other philosophic circles, it had no purpose more definite than a resource against ennui. Ministers, titled ladies, philosophers, and foreigners, met on this neutral ground; they cared little for one another, but they were witty, well bred, and could afford and receive amusement by meeting together. This society was justly admired for the accomplishments of its members, who contributed to spread around them their own polished and unaffected manners. But this was the only influence they exercised. Madame du Def-

* "'Pont de Veyle!' 'Madame!' 'Où êtes vous?' 'Au coin de votre cheminée.' 'Couché les pieds sur les chenets, comme on est chez ses amis?' Oui, madame.' 'Il faut convenir qu'il est peu de liaisons aussi anciennes que la nôtre.' 'Cela est vrai.' 'Il y a cinquante ans.' 'Oui, cinquante ans passés.' 'Et dans ce long intervalle aucun nuage, pas même l'apparence d'une brouillerie.' 'C'est ce que j'ai toujours admiré.' 'Mais, Pont de Veyle, cela ne viendrait-il point de ce qu'au fond nous avons toujours été fort indifférens l'un à l'autre?' 'Cela se pourrait bien, madame.'"

fand had no aim, and she effected nothing. She succeeded, however, in making her house the resort of all the distinguished foreigners who visited France. When the reforming and philosophic sovereign Joseph II., the brother of Marie Antoinette, came to Paris in 1777, he visited Madame du Deffand, whom he found making knots. "This occupation," observed the emperor, "does not prevent you from thinking." "And especially now that you give every one so much cause to think," was Madame du Deffand's prompt and flattering reply.

The keen wit and agreeable conversation of Madame du Deffand were also valued by her countrymen; but the influence she exercised over them was trifling. It requires faith in one's own opinions in order to impart them to others; this Madame du Deffand had not: she may even be said to have survived her own power. The most brilliant period of her circle was during the sway of Choiseul, when the friendship of the powerful minister contributed to her influence. It gradually declined under the reign of Louis XVI.: her wit, by assuming the tone of rancour and malice, had then lost many of its attractions. The times were altered, moreover: the philosophic power had progressed, and no longer sought the patronage of narrow circles; it had become the spirit of the whole nation. The ill-temper and ennui of Madame du Deffand increased on beholding herself neglected. She again attempted to become devout, but complained that she could not understand the epistles of St Paul She took for her confessor the celebrated Père l'Enfant, who perished in the massacre of September, and only kept him six months. After spending thus several years in alternatives of ennui and devotion, she beheld herself at the point of death in the month of September of the year 1780. She sent for the curé of Saint Sulpice, and addressed him thus:—"M. le Curé, you will be satisfied with me; but spare me three things: let me have no questions, no reasons, and no sermons."

Madame du Deffand was attended in her last illness by her old friends, Mesdames de Luxembourg, de Choiseul, and de

Cambise, who played loto near her bedside every evening; and who, it is said, continued this interesting amusement almost to the moment of her death. The nature of the friendship which then united people of the world renders this fact sufficiently probable.

Thus passed from life, in her eighty-fourth year, Madame du Deffand; a clever, selfish woman, fit emblem of the aristocratic society which was, like her, going to disappear, and to be ere long "among the things that were."

CHAPTER VI.

MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE.

Amongst the persons who composed the circle of Madame du Deffand was a young girl named Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, to whom we have as yet only alluded, because she appeared in that society but for a short time, and held an essentially subordinate position amongst the titled individuals of whom it chiefly consisted.

Fiction has seldom brought in contact two beings of natures so dissimilar as when reality caused Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and Madame du Deffand to meet. The blindness, and other infirmities, of Madame du Deffand rendered it necessary for her to have a companion; she took Mademoiselle de Lespinasse for this purpose: the young girl's history was brief and melancholy. She had, in reality, no claim to the name she bore, being the illegitimate daughter of Madame d'Albon, a married lady of high rank. She was brought up in a convent, under the name of Lespinasse; and when she was of age, was placed as a governess in the family of her mother. As Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was acquainted with the secret of her birth, it was doubly painful to her to see herself treated as a poor dependent by the rich and noble family to which she belonged. The affection which Madame d'Albon could only shew her in secret, supported her for some time under her trials; but her mother died, and the proofs of her birth, which she had bequeathed to her, were, as well as a large sum of money, basely wrested from Julie de Lespinasse by her relatives. Her position, being now no longer alleviated by the kindness and love of Madame d'Albon, became singularly painful and humiliating. It was then that she met Madame

du Deffand, and readily accepted her proposal of residing with her as "demoiselle de compagnie."

The cold and selfish Madame du Deffand treated her young dependent with little kindness. She made her sleep, like her, during the day-time, and sit up all night, in order to read aloud to her. This unnatural mode of life completely destroyed the health of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. The only real consolation she found in this melancholy position was the friendship of D'Alembert, the friend of Madame du Deffand; and, as we have already mentioned, the illegitimate son of Madame de Tencin. Even without any regard to the personal merits of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, the warm-hearted D'Alembert could not but feel deep sympathy for the friendless girl,—like him, the unacknowledged offspring of guilty love. The subdued gentleness with which she bore the caprices of her despotic mistress moved him more deeply still. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, touched with the interest he felt in her fate, returned his proffered friendship with all the ardour and enthusiasm of her nature. The loneliness and suffering which embittered her early youth seemed to have added only new intensity to the natural fervour of her feelings. Besides the friendship of D'Alembert, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse also derived exquisite gratification from the intercourse of the select company which met at the house of Madame du Deffand. Few women were, indeed, so admirably adapted as she was for intellectual pleasures: she revelled in them, with a keenness and vivacity wholly unknown to her unimpassioned mistress. This instantaneous impression, made on her mind by whatever was excellent, rendered the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse extremely seducing for men of talent. She pleased—not merely by her own personal attractions, great as they were, but still more by the evident delight she received from the wit and eloquence of those to whom she listened. This singular vividness and delicacy of perception seemed to be communicative; and seldom was anything good or excellent uttered in the presence of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse without having been generally felt and understood.

The visitors of Madame du Deffand soon discovered the great attractions, both personal and mental—for, before she had the small-pox, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was of a very engaging aspect—of her companion; but, in order not to excite the jealousy of their hostess, they avoided, whilst in her presence, taking too much notice of her young dependant. As they were desirous, however, of enjoying the pleasure of her conversation without restraint, they secretly proceeded to her room about an hour before the usual time of calling on Madame du Deffand, who generally slept until the arrival of her guests. For a long time Madame du Deffand remained unconscious of these circumstances; when she, at length, knew of them, her fury was unbounded. She accused Mademoiselle de Lespinasse of the blackest treachery, and announced her intention of dismissing her immediately. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, seeing herself thrown upon the world without a home or the means of procuring one, was driven to despair. The reproaches of Madame du Deffand acted powerfully on her imagination, and, in a fit of that exaggerated sensitiveness which was to prove so fatal to her peace, she swallowed a dose of laudanum. Timely remedies saved her from the consequences of this rash act; but her health, already much impaired, never recovered the shock thus given to her nerves. To Madame du Deffand's cold and insincere expressions of regret, the young girl merely replied: "Madame, it is too late." No other reproach passed her lips.

As soon as Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was sufficiently recovered, they parted. Their separation agitated the whole Parisian world. Ministers and ambassadors took a share in this, then, important affair. After vainly attempting to effect a reconciliation, which circumstances rendered impossible, the society of Madame du Deffand separated into two hostile parties, who filled the whole town with the bitterness of their recriminations. The partisans of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse accused Madame du Deffand of cruelty and selfishness; whilst her adherents painted Mademoiselle de Lespinasse as a monster of ingratitude. Madame du Deffand was, however, severely

blamed by some of her best and most intimate friends. The Maréchale de Luxembourg furnished the apartment taken by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and old President Henault offered to marry her—a proposal which she declined. The Duke of Choiseul, owing to the exertions of her friends, procured her a pension on the king's privy purse; and Madame Geoffrin, with her unostentatious benevolence, made her a yearly allowance. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse being thus placed above want, soon gathered around her a choice literary circle. If a new academy had been opened, it would not have caused so deep a sensation in French society. Many of the friends of Madame du Deffand deserted her, in order to join her young rival: she imperiously bade D'Alembert choose between her and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse: he did not hesitate to join the latter. D'Alembert was one of the few individuals who had the power of banishing Madame du Deffand's ennui: his unaffected manners, the calm and dispassionate turn of his mind, and the engaging mirth and frankness which distinguished him, were all extremely agreeable to her: the loss of his society accordingly embittered her still more against her former companion, of whom she always spoke with the strongest animosity. It was she who spread the report of her marriage with D'Alembert—a report she knew to be false, for it was notoriously D'Alembert's resolve never to marry—in order that it might be supposed their connexion was not so innocent and creditable as the world generally thought it to be. D'Alembert greatly resented those attempts of his former friend (whom he now called "an old viper") to injure Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; and indignantly declared, that though Madame du Deffand might have no faith in virtuous women, her opinion on this subject had very little value. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, however, checked the zeal of her friend: she never allowed the name of Madame du Deffand to be mentioned in her presence with disrespect. She seldom spoke of her former protectress herself, but when she did so it was with a respectful and dignified reserve.

Shortly after his rupture with Madame du Deffand, D'Alembert fell dangerously ill of a contagious fever: he then inhabited the narrow and unhealthy lodging of his nurse, Rousseau the glazier's wife, by whom he had been brought up. The doctor ordered his removal to a healthier apartment; and here, reckless of her personal risk, and of the censure she might incur, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse took her post by the bedside of her friend, refusing to leave him until he was out of danger. When he was convalescent, D'Alembert took an apartment in the same house with her, and death alone had the power of separating these tried and devoted friends. Whether it was merely friendship that united them, and not a deeper feeling, is a question that has often, and very uselessly, been debated. The world received their version as the true one, and there is much to confirm it. D'Alembert seems to have entertained a warmer sentiment than mere friendship for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; but he was too calm to experience a very deep passion, and to one of her ardent nature any other feeling would scarcely have been acceptable. He was, besides, notoriously averse to marriage, whereas Mademoiselle de Lespinasse wished to marry. As friends they might agree; but it is very improbable that they could have done so long, if their connexion had been of a closer nature.

Though consisting chiefly of the same guests who had formerly frequented Madame du Deffand's, the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse took a tone very different from that which had distinguished the elegant and worldly visitors of the convent Saint Joseph. Ideas of reform and the doctrines of political economy were then beginning to agitate and divide French society; Mademoiselle de Lespinasse sided with the economists and philosophic reformers. Turgot, the future minister of state; the bitter Morellet who expounded his theories, and whom Voltaire aptly called Mord-les, (bite-them;) Diderot, D'Alembert, Marmontel, Chastellux, and Saint-Lambert, were her constant guests: they made her house the central point whence they disseminated their doctrines in

financial, political, and literary matters. All the foreigners of distinction also visited Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; and it was a subject of some jealousy between her and Madame du Deffand as to which of the two should have most Englishmen. Walpole, taking Madame du Deffand's part, refused to see her rival; Hume contrived to be on good terms with both. It was at the house of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse that all Hume's Parisian friends, as well as their hostess and D'Alembert, concluded that he could not well avoid publishing an account of his discussions with Rousseau, and discuss all the circumstances of that celebrated quarrel. The bureaux d'esprit were also social tribunals, which decided every important question connected with literary matters.

All the accounts left of the society of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, represent it as one of the most agreeable places of Parisian resort. There might be seen every evening the most remarkable individuals of every rank. The church, the state, and the army, were as fairly represented in her drawing-room as philosophy; and when, though this happened rarely, she either went to the country or to the play, all Paris was informed beforehand of the important event. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was perhaps one of the most fascinating women of her day. Many surpassed her in youth and beauty—for she had never been very handsome, and when her society was fully formed she had already passed the golden days of youth —many were as clever, and a greater number still were far more brilliant and witty; but none equalled her in that deep power of seduction—deep and great, because involuntarily exercised—which drew around her the most celebrated men of those times. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse listened more than she spoke; but when she did speak it was admirably: she uttered, however, no witticisms, and none of those artificially clever sayings then so much in vogue; and which often look as though they had been prepared beforehand for the occasions on which they were delivered. Her power was not merely intellectual: it sprang less from the activity of her mind than from the depth and fervour of her feelings. This

very fervour seemed to say that she was not formed for happiness: she was too ardent and excitable for this calm state of mind. Secluded from affection during her unhappy youth, her whole soul, on regaining its freedom, gave itself up, not to ordinary love, but to a bewildering and intoxicating passion never meant for earth. It was this inward fire which, whilst it consumed her frail being, gave her so deep a charm, and imparted to her language a passion and eloquence rarely surpassed.

With respect to the society over which she presided, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had another remarkable and still more necessary talent: it was the infinite tact with which she brought the most opposite characters into contact, and kept them together in perfect harmony. Without imposing any restraint on conversation, she knew how to direct it, and prevent it from ever becoming vapid or insignificant: in that age of women, accomplished in the art of guiding social intercourse, none excelled her in this respect.

It was not, however, the aim of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to check discussion; which was then the spirit of every meeting. All the new works were reviewed and criticised in the fashionable drawing-rooms, where the acts of the government likewise underwent a free scrutiny: circumstances compelled society to be its own organ. The result of this was, that discussions, through long practice, were carried on with a politeness and courtly ease now unknown in France; in consequence of the political changes which have since then occurred in that country. In a nation absolutely governed, party-spirit never could run high; the Revolution, by rousing the passions of the masses, substituted a more energetic, but less elegant mode of expressing them. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse greatly encouraged this habit of discussing the questions of the day: it imparted to the men who assembled in her house a social power, by means of which they afterwards attained to political eminence. These discussions, at the same time, gave them the dangerous habit of judging and deciding rapidly questions that required the exercise of a calm and dispassionate mind.

It argues greatly in favour of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's attractions, that the distinguished men who were preparing the approaching change in the fundamental principles of government, gathered around her without any motives to do so beyond her own merits. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had no position in society—no connexions; and, not being sufficiently wealthy to keep open house, she only received between the hours of dinner and supper. Even D'Alembert, who listened to her with child-like docility, was confessedly only a secondary attraction, when compared to his friend. She was the only woman whom Madame Geoffrin admitted at the dinner she gave to literary men once a week, and over which the presence of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse shed a singular charm, whether she listened to the discourse of others, as her own taste and unaffected modesty prompted her to do, or whether she spoke with that flow of pure and eloquent language with which she was gifted.

But with the external graces of a Frenchwoman of the eighteenth century, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had none of the heartlessness which characterised the period: her soul had all the fire and passion of those burning climes where life passes as a feverish dream. Indifference was a feeling unknown to her: she either revelled in enthusiastic bliss, or she was overwhelmed with despair. A calm and even state of mind was insupportable to her; and, fatal as it proved to her peace, it was perhaps this perpetual mobility of feeling and impressions which rendered her presence so deeply attractive.

Amongst the foreigners of distinction who called on this fascinating woman, during their stay in Paris, was the Marquis of Mora, a young Spanish noble of distinguishd talents. He soon conceived a deep passion for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; this feeling almost resembled idolatry: even the least penetrating among her guests noticed his silent and fervent adoration. The family of M. de Mora heard of his attachment, and fearing lest he should be seduced into a marriage with one so much beneath him in birth and fortune,

they called him back to Spain. Before his departure, the Marquis of Mora declared his passion, and received from Mademoiselle de Lespinasse the assurance that it was returned. M. de Mora remained three years in his native country; his health, which was naturally delicate, became seriously impaired; his parents, however, only waited for his convalescence in order to marry him suitably to his rank. The correspondence between the lovers was incessant during their separation; but the obstacles her passion received embittered the temper of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and the excellent D'Alembert, though still devotedly attached to her, often suffered from her caprices. Such, however, was the sincerity of his affection, that it was he who every morning went to the post-office in order to look for the letters of M. de Mora, which he brought back to Mademoiselle de Lespinasse by the time she wakened. On learning the illness of her lover, she prevailed on D'Alembert to obtain from his friend Lorry, the celebrated doctor, a written declaration that the climate of Spain disagreed with the young noble, and that in order to save his life it would be necessary to let him visit Paris once more. On learning this, the family of M. de Mora no longer refused to accede to his wishes; he was accordingly allowed to set out for France: but the fatigue of the journey was too much for him in his weakened state, and he died at Bordeaux without having seen once more the woman he had so ardently loved.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was overwhelmed with grief, and from that time she slowly declined. Regret for the death of her lover was thought to be the reason of her failing health; but such was not the case: deep as that grief was, there lay hidden in her heart another sorrow deeper still.

During the absence of M. de Mora, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had met with the Count of Guibert—a man who then ranked high in the opinion of the world, though now comparatively forgotten. His talents were remarkable, without being of the first order; the secret of his great success, especially with women, was the singular charm of his conversation: brilliant,

vigorous, original—not, perhaps, in idea, but in manner—it never seemed to weary. Such was the power of his diction, that, when he read aloud his indifferent tragedy of the "Connétable," he never failed to excite the highest enthusiasm in his audience, who all felt convinced they had heard a masterpiece; it was not until they read for themselves that the charm was dissolved. The character of this clever man was a compound of ambitious and generous feelings: the former, however, greatly predominated.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse saw him, and the universal fascination which he exercised became, in her ardent soul, a deeper feeling. M. de Mora was not forgotten, but he no longer held the same place in her heart; she idolised his virtues, his generous and noble mind; but she did not love him as she had loved him once. Whilst she thus obeyed a fascination that appears to have been irresistible, her soul was, however, burdened with grief and remorse. Her inconstancy lowered her in her own esteem: she felt herself becoming unworthy of M. de Mora, and that for one whose feelings towards her were scarcely above indifference; and yet, notwithstanding every emotion of pride, shame, and regret, she still blindly loved on, consuming her being in this vain struggle against a hopeless passion. The death of M. de Mora added to her grief, but could not lessen her unhappy love.

M. de Guibert soon perceived the passion he had inspired. He felt nothing for Mademoiselle de Lespinasse beyond mere friendship—if his feelings went so far; but his vanity was flattered to see himself so ardently beloved by an admired and accomplished woman. He spoke and acted as though her feelings were returned. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse blinded herself wilfully: she would not see that M. de Guibert was only yielding to the suggestions of vanity; that he had no real affection for her. For some time the seduction of her manners kept her lover really spell-bound, and under her control. But a passion so ardent as was hers could not always be one of unbroken serenity. On the first stormy ex-

planation, M. de Guibert resumed his freedom. When he said, "We must love no longer!" Mademoiselle de Lespinasse answered with all her remaining strength, "Then I cannot live!" Touched by her despair he endeavoured to soothe her, and partly succeeded; but she soon gave him an opportunity of repeating his assertion of indifference: and thus he kept her for several years, alternately declaring that he shared her feelings, or that he could never love her; every time inflicting a deeper wound, until his marriage with another broke the last hope of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and with it her heart. From that time forward until the epoch of her death, which occurred soon afterwards, she only pined slowly away.

It was whilst Mademoiselle de Lespinasse thus consumed her life in despairing grief—with occasional gleams of hope, whose transient sunshine scarcely enlivened the dreary desert over which she trod alone—that she addressed to M. de Guibert those admirable and impassioned letters, in which she describes the torments of her soul with such painful fidelity, that, notwithstanding the errors of this ill-disciplined being, it is impossible to lay down the book with any other feeling than one of deep and unmingled pity.

The style of this singular correspondence—written whilst Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was sinking under the pressure of woe and disease, and when she was also ennervated by the use of opium, to which her want of rest compelled her to resort—is, nevertheless, full of life, vigour, and eloquence. If these letters have not yet assumed their place amongst the classical works of the eighteenth century, it can only be attributed to the contagious and despairing melancholy that breathes in every page.

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was painfully conscious of her errors: her letters are full of self-reproach; but, though she owed all her misery to the impassioned nature which, according to her own admission, carried every feeling to excess, and made it impossible for her to love moderately, she would not have exchanged her sufferings for the joy of others.

"If I had been calm, reasonable, and cold," she observed in one of her letters to M. de Guibert, "nothing of all this would have happened. I would have spent my life like those women who play with their fans, talking of the judgment of M. Morangiez, or of the entry of the Countess of Provence into Paris. But, I repeat it, I prefer my misery to all which the worldly may call happiness or pleasure. I may die; but better this than to have never lived."

Of the burning eloquence profusely poured forth in her letters, extracts can give no adequate idea, though they may serve to paint the state of her mind. How deep, in its very gentleness, is the reproach conveyed in her answer to a coldly compassionate letter of M. de Guibert. "Pity me, my friend, but do not tell me that you pity me." And how much of the wretchedness which consumed her soul is laid bare in the following letter:—

"Ah! if you were to know what I suffer: how fearfully my heart is torn when I am abandoned to myself; when I am no longer supported by your presence or your memory. Ah! then it is that the remembrance of M. de Mora becomes a feeling so active and so penetrating, that I am filled with horror for life and for my love. I abhor the erring passion which has made me so guilty; which has made me fill with anxiety and fear a heart so tender and wholly devoted to me. . . . . Oh! how much was I loved by that soul so full of fire and energy, which had appreciated and judged everything, and which, indifferent to all else, had abandoned itself to the want and the delight of loving. Thus, my friend, thus was I loved.

"Several years had elapsed, fraught with all the charm and all the woe inseparable from a passion so strong and so deep, when you came to pour poison into my heart, and to lay waste my soul with doubt and remorse. Oh, my God! what did you not make me suffer! You drew me away from my love, and yet I saw that you were not mine: do you understand all the horror of this position? How can one live through so much grief? How can one still find happi-

ness in saying, 'My friend, I love you, and that with so much truth and tenderness, that it is impossible your soul can remain cold whilst listening to me?'"

This style is carried further still in another letter, written at midnight, on the anniversary of M. de Mora's decease. After dwelling on the virtues of her former lover, and on her faithlessness to him at the very epoch of his death, in the most forcible language, she suddenly adds, without any transition: "I am dying with grief: my eyes and my heart are full of tears. Farewell! I should not have loved you." And the contrast of this simple yet deep expression of regret, to the excess of her offence, before so strikingly portrayed, renders her overwhelming remorse only more apparent.

These feelings, preying on a mind so ardent and sensitive, soon reduced Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to the verge of insanity. When she learned the approaching marriage of M. de Guibert she felt herself that it was thus. "I feel it: my life depends on my madness: if I were to become calm, if reason were restored to me, I could not live twenty-four hours longer. Do you know the first want of my soul when it has been violently agitated by pleasure or grief? It is to write to M. de Mora! I reanimate him: I call him back to life. My heart rests on his; my soul is poured forth before him: the warmth, the rapidity of my blood conquer death; for I see him: he lives, he breathes, for me; he hears me: my brain is on fire, I no longer need illusion: truth itself is before me. Yes, you are not more present, more perceptible to my senses, than M. de Mora has been for the last hour. . . . Divine creature! he has forgiven me: he loved me! . . . Ah! how deep a bliss there is in love! Love, the sole principle of all that is beautiful, of all that is good and great in nature."

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse had borne the marriage of M. de Guibert with comparative calmness, but it was the natural and inevitable indifference of manner which followed it that she could not bear. Gathering around her all the womanly pride which she had cast away so long, she addressed her former lover thus:—

"I have forbidden myself complaints and reproaches: it seemed to me that it would be base to speak of my misfortune to him who had caused it wilfully. . . . . Without supposing you to feel any great tenderness for me, or much interest in my fate, I thought I might rely on what decency and my misfortune prescribed to you. I waited; and, after a lapse of ten days since your absence, I received from the castle of C—— a note which is a masterpiece of indifference and harshness. It filled me with indignation. I conceived a feeling of horror against you, and soon afterwards against myself. . . . . Your marriage, in allowing me to know your soul, has repulsed and closed mine for ever. Oh, no! do not think that I shall follow your advice, and take my models from the novels of Madame Riccoboni. Oh! how deeply your comparison between my misfortune and that incident in the novel wounded me! How cold and deficient in delicacy, you then appeared to me! and how much above you I thought myself by feeling that I was capable of a passion you could not even understand. . . . . I will not tell you that I wish for your friendship, or that I have any for you: the charm and pleasure of this feeling is the confidence on which it is founded; and you know whether your actions and general conduct were likely to inspire me with any. Farewell!—allow me the impulse of pride and vengeance, which makes me find pleasure in declaring that I forgive you, and that it is no longer in your power to make me know apprehension and grief under any aspect whatsoever."

With this last effort of pride and injured love, the strength of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse deserted her: she wrote no more to M. de Guibert, and died silently: carrying, as she thought, her secret to the grave.

The death of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was an event long felt in French society: she was, however, more regretted by her acquaintances than by her friends. This was natural and just. A soul so absorbed by passion as was hers could no longer be adapted for the calm and gentle offices of friendship. During the latter portion of her life, the society over which

she presided had even become burdensome to her. She was often obliged to leave her drawing-room in an uncontrollable burst of grief, in order to seek some retired spot where she might weep and mourn alone. Notwithstanding the alteration of her behaviour, from which he had suffered more than any one, D'Alembert never ceased to deplore the loss of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. On hearing of her death, Madame du Deffand pettishly exclaimed, "If she had only died fifteen years sooner, I should not have lost D'Alembert!" A touching funeral eulogy, worthy of the heart of her by whom it was uttered.

It was long believed that grief for the death of M. de Mora had carried Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to the grave. The publication of her letters to M. de Guibert first revealed the error and misery of this unhappy woman; whose ardent feelings, unsubdued by judgment, cut her off prematurely from the world where she had suffered so deeply in the course of a brief life.

There is in the strange character and destiny of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse a social meaning that should not be forgotten. She embodied the sufferings of the age in her love sorrows. She was separated from M. de Mora, whom she would, perhaps, have never ceased to love but for that separation; and she lost the love of M. de Guibert because she was not a high-born and noble woman. Like Rousseau, she had aspirations towards democracy; and for being silent and secret, like her grief, those aspirations were not the less deep. The aristocratic world in which she lived, by which she was both slighted and admired, where she might love but was never to be loved in return,—not, at least, by a pure and honourable love,—had grown odious to her. If, like Rousseau, she had not become one of the voices of the age, it was because she was a woman, and that her sorrows were essentially womanly. She shrank from exposing them to public scorn. D'Alembert himself never knew of her love for M. de Guibert until after her death; when he was painfully affected by discovering that it was not only M. de Mora whom she had preferred to him, but that there was also another.

The whole life of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was a real though vain protest against the conventional society from which she had suffered so much. She was silent under her sorrows, not only for the reasons already mentioned, but also because her eloquence, though deep, was less the eloquence of genius than that of a despairing and broken heart. Had she been happy and beloved, her name would now be scarcely known : she would be remembered as one of the accomplished women of her times ; but the few literary productions she has left—and they are singularly slight and uninteresting—would have inevitably given a most erroneous opinion of her mind. Her power was not creative, as that of genius always is ; but if she could not conceive, she felt deeply, and expressed her feelings with heart-rending truth and bitterness : and yet there is, as we have already said, a deep social meaning in her life. She was one of that vast multitude who, though surrounded and contaminated by the sceptical and corrupting influences of the eighteenth century, had yet in them the germ of a nobler nature, and yearned for a purer and freer air than the heated and artificial atmosphere they breathed. Those aspirations towards excellence marked the last days of Louis XV.'s reign, and the opening of his successor's sway. They foretold the coming revolution, and the existence of a vast discontent which rendered it inevitable.

How many, like Rousseau or Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, were then crushed by those social distinctions which they so deeply despised. How many, like them, by the public or private expression of their feelings, hastened the decay of a hateful tyranny, until it fell overwhelmed, in the universal reprobation. Democracy, however mistaken in the forms it may assume, is but the open expression of the long and unknown sufferings of the multitude. Thus, when great crises are at hand, every token of the times assumes new interest, and there may be found deep significance, even in the hidden sorrows of a lonely woman's heart.

CHAPTER VII.

MADAME GEOFFRIN—INFLUENCE OF THE BUREAUX D'ESPRIT.

ONE of the few women whom Madame de Tencin admitted to her réunions towards the close of her life, was a quiet, middle-aged bourgeoise, unassuming alike in dress and manner, and named Madame Geoffrin. "She comes here to see what she can secure out of my inheritance," Madame de Tencin often observed, with a smile, to her friends. Madame Geoffrin's object was, indeed, to become personally acquainted with the eminent men who met at the house of the ex-nun, in order, whenever her demise should occur, to gather them around herself.

Madame de Tencin was neither annoyed nor disturbed by the knowledge of her visitor's intentions: she received her well, and even gave her some professional advice. The following maxim is characteristic of the donor: "Be complaisant to every man you know: though nine out of ten should not care a whit for you, the tenth may live to prove a useful friend." Without acting exclusively according to this precept, Madame Geoffrin fully retained the spirit of the advice she had received.

On the death of Madame de Tencin, the bourgeoise effected the long-cherished project of succeeding to her power. She greatly enlarged the circle of her predecessor, and may be said to have founded a new society, which rivalled that of Madame du Deffand; between whom and Madame Geoffrin there accordingly sprang up an open and lasting feeling of enmity.

It was the thirst of worldly distinction which then possessed the members of every class of society, that induced Madame Geoffrin to open a bureaux d'esprit. She knew that

she had no brilliant talents by which she could shine herself, and therefore wished to be considered the friend and patroness of eminent men. Her love of empire, moreover, made her desire to rule quietly over an admired literary court. She was neither extremely witty nor even educated, since she did not know how to spell; but literature and philosophy were then all the rage; Madame Geoffrin complied with the prevailing tone, and opened her house to the philosophic tribe. Notwithstanding the deficiencies of her education, she was well fitted for her self-appointed task: her excellent sense, benevolence, and deep knowledge of the world, adapted her admirably to lead and conciliate the vain and irritable sect she had undertaken to patronise.

Her tact and kindness soon rendered her house one of the rendezvous of the Parisian world. Her power, in time, even became so high that all the German courts, that had any pretensions to philosophy, duly paid correspondents to inform them of the subjects discussed by her circle. One of the first acts of Catherine II., on ascending the imperial throne of Russia, was to send a salaried commissioner to the court of Madame Geoffrin; who, by her consummate tact, had succeeded in rendering it the European school of bon ton. Madame Geoffrin's great study in life had been to gain that acquaintance with the world which was necessary to the position she intended to assume: she soon excelled in this knowledge, which supplied the deficiencies of her education. Though she was not versed either in literature or in art, she drew around her authors and artists, and by listening à propos, and never speaking on what she did not understand, succeeded in presiding with infinite grace and judgment over their meetings.

Madame Geoffrin was not, however, a mere silent listener: she had learned, in the intercourse of persons of high rank, whom she adroitly induced to visit her, that peculiar phraseology, exquisitely polished even in its incorrectness, known as the "style de grand seigneur." No one surpassed her in the art of story-telling: her language was clear, concise, and dis-

played the mingled sense and shrewdness of her mind. The ideas of Madame Geoffrin never soared, however, above her station : she was as essentially a modest and sensible bourgeoise, as Madame du Deffand was a brilliant and Epicurean woman of the world. The plainness of her person, and the elegant simplicity of her attire ; the manner in which she provided her house with all the luxurious comforts of wealth, free from its ostentatious éclat ; and her own timidity, good sense, and mingled thrift and benevolence, were alike characteristic of the middle classes of life to which she belonged. Her wit was, like everything about her, quiet and unpretending ; it never stepped beyond a certain circle : she often gave to the most ingenious ideas a homely and even commonplace form. Her repartees are generally too idiomatic to bear translation. A person was once speaking in her presence of the Abbé Trublet, a man of little talent, but who, by living in the intercourse of Fontenelle and other talented men, had acquired a certain degree of tact and cleverness. "Ah !' said Madame Geoffrin, with her usual bonhomie, "c'est un sot frotté d'esprit"—*a fool rubbed over with wit*, may give some idea of her meaning. This bon-mot had immense success, the poor abbé being very much disliked. There was still more severity in her observation concerning Richelieu and Voisenon, the most corrupt men of the age. "These two men are, after all, only the peelings (épluchures) of great vices." But her most celebrated remark, and that which shews best the kindness and worldly knowledge by which she was so much distinguished, is that which she addressed to her friend Rulhière. He had written a work containing disclosures on the court of Russia, and from the publication of which he expected to derive considerable gains. Madame Geoffrin, thinking, on the contrary, that this work might bring him into trouble, offered him a large sum to suppress it. Rulhière's reply was an elegant declamation against the meanness of accepting money in order to conceal the truth. Madame Geoffrin heard him to the end, she then quietly said, "How much more will you have, Rulhière ?" When this

anecdote was related by Rulhière himself to the Prince of Schomberg, the latter, forgetting in the presence of whom he was speaking, enthusiastically exclaimed, "Ah ! c'est sublime !"

It was not often that Madame Geoffrin indulged in witticisms: she was, at the same time, severe and indulgent. Her temper, which she took great pains to subdue, was by nature somewhat brusque and impatient; but her judgment was calm, and, as she was perfectly unimaginative, she could seldom be deceived in her opinion—rarely a favourable one—of the characters of those around her. But, whilst experience of the world rendered her a keen judge of human foibles, her kindness of heart made her deal gently with the errors she saw most clearly. "To give and forgive" was her maxim throughout life; and no one ever accused her of having failed in carrying it into practice. So far did she extend her forbearance, even with regard to the most trivial matters, that she held it a duty to listen as attentively to the tedious speeches of a fool as to the brilliant and amusing discourse of a man of wit. "Besides," she philosophically added, when explaining this theory to a friend, "if you let a fool alone, he will talk about himself; and, let him be ever so foolish, this is a subject on which he can scarcely fail to become instructive and eloquent." The close and ever-attentive observer of human nature is betrayed by this remark.

It was this calm good sense and gentle forbearance that constituted Madame Geoffrin's great attraction. She was benevolent; but those who had no benefits to derive from her sought her company as eagerly as those whom she assisted. She did not dazzle like Madame du Deffand, or fascinate like Mademoiselle de Lespinasse; but she had a homely, familiar charm of her own. Without much originality, without acquired knowledge, and even without anything resembling brilliancy or imagination, the quiet, prosaical bourgeoise exercised a power which was widely felt. No one who had seen her once in her own house, neatly but always simply attired, sitting by the fireside in her large arm-chair, her hands de-

murely folded on her knees, her gentle countenance beaming with cheerfulness, whilst she occasionally uttered one of her brief but clear and penetrating remarks—no one who had once seen and heard her thus, but wished to see more of Madame Geoffrin.

It was, indeed, like a mother in the midst of her children, that Madame Geoffrin presided over the circle she had gathered around her. She listened to her friends, spoke very little herself, and was never ashamed of confessing her ignorance. "What!" said she, when an Italian abbé once wished to dedicate to her a grammar of his native language, "dedicate a grammar to me, when I do not even know how to spell?" At the same time, she exercised a direct and motherly control over her guests. They were not to attack the state; their philosophy was to be of the most sober cast; she would not have loud or earnest discussions even on literary subjects: everything was to be quiet, composed, and moderate, like her own feelings. Though she scarcely appeared to interfere in the conversations going on around her, Madame Geoffrin found the means, by her infinite tact, to set to it the precise limits she wished it to have. She was naturally too timid and cautious to tolerate the philosophic exaggerations of her friends. It soon became notorious in "the holy philosophic church," as the philosophers very irreverently styled their body, that "Mère Geoffrin" would by no means allow imprudence of any sort, and that those who frequented her house must necessarily submit to the regulations she thought fit to establish.

Although she thus set very firm bounds to the intellectual freedom which was the very spirit of philosophy, Madame Geoffrin was tenderly loved by her friends. Few could resist the charm of her abrupt but inexhaustible kindness of heart, and those who could have withstood this attraction found her dinners and evening parties too admirably organised to be given up for want of a little complaisance on their part. Madame Geoffrin was, however, thought to carry her empire sometimes too far. Not satisfied with checking the expres-

sion of opinion, she wished to interfere in the private affairs of her friends: always, it is true, with the object of rendering them some service, whether in the shape of advice or of pecuniary assistance. She was proud—and with reason—of her consummate knowledge of the world; and as nothing flattered more her good-natured vanity than to be appealed to in delicate matters, so she was not a little mortified when her counsels were either rejected or despised. One of her fundamental maxims was, that poor literary men were bound to remain single. If, in spite of her advice, some needy author thought fit to marry, she was extremely angry with him; but invariably ended by relenting, visiting his wife, spoiling the children, if there were any, and doing everything in her power to lighten the burden of an increasing family.

But though Madame Geoffrin was an active and disinterested friend, she was not capable of experiencing the heroic and devoted feelings which can raise friendship to the height of a passion. Her friendship was, like her benevolence, without the tenderness which gives those feelings their greatest charm. She was as impatient to oblige her friends as to assist persons in distress; but she did not like to be pained by the sight of the sufferings she relieved: she dreaded emotion under every aspect: to pass quietly through life; to be both useful and respected; and, if possible, never to be annoyed or deranged, was her great object. There was, in all her generosity, a sort of latent selfishness, which rendered it, perhaps, more human, but not the less worthy of respect for this. The greatest blemish in her character was moral timidity: she would do much for a friend, but she could not compromise herself on his account. She never liked to praise her friends to strangers: she averred that it only excited envy. She likewise made it a rule not to defend them if they were attacked in her presence; for this, she said, only irritated their enemies still further.

The same cautiousness marked her own conduct. Notwithstanding her philosophic connexions, Madame Geoffrin was devout; but this she concealed with as much care as another

woman would have taken to hide her love intrigues. She attended mass privately, had an apartment in a convent, and a pew in the church of the Capucins; but all this was conducted with profound mystery, and studiously concealed from her friends. This fact gives a very forcible opinion of the singular intolerance the philosophers exercised. At the same time, and though Madame Geoffrin owed to the position she had assumed the title of foster-mother of the philosophers, she never tolerated the atheism of Diderot, or the doctrines of Helvetius. They both originally belonged to her society; but, though she was attached to them personally, she found the means of quietly dropping their public acquaintance; in consequence of which they joined the society of Baron d'Holbach. This separation was effected without the least éclat, which Madame Geoffrin always feared and disliked. Her subserviency to the opinion of the world was well known amongst her friends, who could ascertain, by the scarcely perceptible variations of her manner, their position in society. When Helvetius had published his celebrated and much-condemned work, he laughingly said—"I shall easily know the effect it has produced on the public, by the manner of Madame Geoffrin on our next meeting."

The wealth of Madame Geoffrin allowed her to indulge in her benevolence—and she seems to have been munificent in a singular degree—as well as in the hospitality she gave to literature, without any detriment to her fortune. Her husband, a quiet and not very clever man, allowed his wife to indulge in her tastes to the fullest extent, and contented himself with superintending the costly entertainments she gave to her guests; by many of whom he was only known as "the old gentleman who sat in a corner saying nothing."

The society which gathered around Madame Geoffrin was composed partly of the disciples of Voltaire, and partly of those of Rousseau; though she tolerated the friends of the Genevese, she had a very ill opinion of his character, the violent and declamatory tone of which was not indeed likely to please her sober judgment. We have already said, that

Madame Geoffrin did not allow great freedom of discussion; but she only moderated the imprudence of her friends: she did not seek to guide them, for the reason that she had few opinions of her own on the subjects they discussed. Thus, notwithstanding her prudence and cautiousness, the society which met at her house was distinguished for the individual independence of its members. Madame Geoffrin gave two dinners a week; one destined to artists, and the other to men of letters. D'Alembert and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse were present at the latter of those dinners. D'Alembert, released from his severe though beloved studies, displayed that frank, boyish mirth which had formerly amused Madame du Deffand. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, more grave than her friend, and, latterly, rather sad and weary-looking, occasionally broke forth from her habitual silence, to speak briefly, and yet eloquently, on the subject discussed by the other guests. Marivaux—who saw a finesse in all that was said or done, and who tortured his subtle but unimaginative mind, in order to give an ingenious turn to everything he uttered—was also there. The cold and reserved Thomas, whose fame has suffered from the proud indifference he felt for the women of his time; the declamatory Raynal; Mairan, the learned antagonist of Madame du Chatelet; her lover, Saint-Lambert; the keen, satirical Galiani; and many now forgotten, but who then had their day, were also among the guests of Madame Geoffrin. She presided at these dinners with her usual tact, directing conversation by occasional interjections—an art in which she excelled—or exercising her talent of story-telling for the amusement of her guests.

Besides the distinction which the friendship of men of talent naturally conferred upon her, the gentle Madame Geoffrin did not fail in worldly honours. Stanislaus Poniatowski, whilst he was still a Polish noble, visited her house, and was a great favourite with her, always calling her by the endearing name of "mother." His extravagance having made him run into debt, he was imprisoned in Fort l'Evêque. Madame Geoffrin, on hearing of his mishap, immediately satisfied the demands

of his creditors. The sovereign did not forget the debt of kindness incurred by the obscure noble; and when Stanislaus had been raised to the throne of Poland, one of his first acts was to write to Madame Geoffrin, "Mamma, your son is king." He invited her, in the same letter, to come and visit him in Warsaw. Notwithstanding her advanced age, Madame Geoffrin complied with his request. Her journey through Germany was a complete triumph; she was especially received with distinguished honours by the Empress Maria Theresa, who was then concluding her alliance with France, and did not neglect this opportunity of shewing the esteem in which she held the nation over which her daughter was to reign. On her arrival in the king's palace, at Warsaw, Madame Geoffrin was inexpressibly touched to find herself introduced into an apartment absolutely similar to that which she occupied in Paris. The attentions of her adopted son, during her sojourn with him, were marked by the same delicacy and gallantry. On her return through Vienna, she again saw Maria Theresa, who presented her daughters to her. Marie Antoinette, when Queen of France, recollected this interview, and on meeting Madame Geoffrin, at a subsequent epoch, reminded her of it in flattering terms. Such was the importance in which the quiet Madame Geoffrin was then held, that the least details of her journey to Poland, and the letters which she wrote home to her friends, occupied all the polite world of Paris during the time of her absence. She even acquired a sort of political power, or rather influence, through the friendship of Prince Kaunitz, one of the distinguished foreigners who visited her house. Owing to her intervention, he softened the difficulties which awaited Cardinal Rohan's embassy at the court of Vienna.

Nothing had been wanting to gratify the ambition of the kind-hearted and amiable bourgeoise when the increasing infirmities of old age told her of her approaching end. She understood the warning, and submitted to her fate, with calm and unaffected resignation. The latter days of her life were, however, embittered by the quarrels of her philosophic friends

with her daughter, Madame de la Ferté-Imbault; who had always manifested the greatest antipathy for the whole tribe of authors who visited her mother's house, and many of whom were, she knew, wholly dependent upon her bounty. This lady refused, during the last illness of her mother, to admit D'Alembert, Morellet, and Marmontel into her presence; alleging that they would, according to the custom of ultra-philosophers in such cases, have endeavoured to prevent Madame Geoffrin from fulfilling her religious duties. Without contradicting this imputation, the philosophers complained very bitterly of Madame de la Ferté-Imbault's conduct, and were so unrestrained in their language that, when Madame Geoffrin partly recovered, she found herself compelled, by the éclat they had made, to cease seeing either her daughter or her three friends. She naturally decided the case in favour of Madame de la Ferté-Imbault, and, without wholly approving her conduct—which had been as deficient in tact and wisdom as that of the philosophers was in delicacy—she observed, with a smile, "that she had acted like Godefroy de Bouillon, by defending her tomb against the infidels." With the exception of D'Alembert, Morellet, and Marmontel, she saw all her friends as usual, until a relapse of her complaint carried her off, in the autumn of 1777; she was then in the seventy-eighth year of her age.

Nothing could exceed the serenity of her last hours. Two days before her death some of her friends, who were seated near her bedside, discussed aloud the means a government possessed of rendering men happier. Every one had given his opinion on the subject, when Madame Geoffrin, who then suffered acutely, wakening up from her seeming torpor, quietly observed, "You have not spoken of the duty of governments to procure pleasures for their subjects: sufficient attention has never been paid to this point." The same wish of quiet, practical usefulness, which had been her characteristic throughout life, animated her to the last.

Notwithstanding her inexhaustible kindness, and many high qualities, the excellent Madame Geoffrin was very soon

forgotten; even by those who had formerly derived most benefits from her friendship. A few there were, however, like Madame Suard, the author's wife, who could not pass by the house where Madame Geoffrin had once resided, without pausing to bless in their hearts the gentle memory of her who had dwelt there so long. D'Alembert felt the loss of his old friend very deeply. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, with whom he had been in the habit of spending his evenings, had not long been dead, and every morning he went to seek consolation in the society of the kind and soothing Madame Geoffrin. "Alas!" he mournfully exclaimed, when she too was taken from him—"Alas! I have now neither evenings nor mornings left!"

The deaths of Hume, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and Madame Geoffrin, occurring, as they did, within the space of one year, were serious losses to the philosophic party; which gradually declined in strength as a compact body, whilst it daily acquired new power by disseminating its doctrines more widely. The bureau d'esprit of Madame Geoffrin may almost be considered as the last of its class. It is true that she was outlived by Madame du Deffand; but her society, as has already been shewn, was latterly only the shadow of what it once had been: the ill-temper of the selfish, blind, old woman, repelled even her most intimate and attached friends. The influence of Madame Geoffrin was great in one sense, and inconsiderable in another. It was extensive, but not deep. To assist her friends, to give them a social tone, to impart to them her keen practical knowledge of the world, such was her object, apart from her personal views of securing general esteem and good-will. She succeeded in effecting her aim, and went no further: she repressed the imprudence of some views expressed by her protégés; but abstained from substituting for them any opinions of her own: she felt her deficiencies, and acted wisely. At the same time she proved an auxiliary of considerable value to the encyclopédistes, for the furtherance of whose work she is said to have spent very large sums.

The "Encyclopédie," from a purely scientific undertaking, had then assumed the tone and importance of a party affair. This was chiefly owing to the injudicious opposition of Government, by whom it was forbidden, and in spite of whom it was universally read. Inflated by their success, the authors of the "Encyclopédie" henceforth assumed the most sectarian and intolerant tone: they literally crushed all those who ventured to oppose them or their doctrines. Gilbert, the unhappy and gifted poet, not only disdained their applause, but had the audacity to expose their ridicules in his admirable satires. This independence proved fatal to him: persecuted and reviled, he closed his brief and troubled life in an hospital; whilst hundreds of men without his genius were flattered and admired in every fashionable drawing-room.

With Madame Geoffrin, as we have already said, closed the bureaux d'esprit. It may now, perhaps, be asked, What influence did those assemblies exercise over the eighteenth century? This influence depended greatly on the individual characters of the women by whom it was possessed. Clear and analytic with Madame de Tencin, artistic under Madame de la Popelinière, brilliant and selfish when exercised by Madame du Deffand, eloquent when by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and half kind half worldly with Madame Geoffrin, it was eminently a social influence; but, unless in the sense that society reacts on literature, it was not literary.

The women of the eighteenth century rendered society singularly polished and elegant; but they could not prevent it from being tainted by the evil tendencies which such large and artificial meetings as those they presided over must necessarily have. The variety of pleasures necessary to amuse so many individuals bred habits of frivolous thought and ill-concealed ennui. Every subject was treated with heartless levity: enthusiasm, serious thought, or generous impulses, were alike proscribed and withered by the cold, worldly spirit which then prevailed. It was natural that the sense of the ridiculous should be strongly developed amongst individuals, who, after all, had little else to do than to laugh

good-naturedly at their friends; for spite or hatred were feelings far too strong and deep for them. Occasionally such beings as Madame du Deffand, with her open rancour, or Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, with her fervour and enthusiasm, would break through the bounds of this artificial world; and were almost equally blamed by those who could see no greater crime than to infringe the state of polite indifference which they had fixed upon as the supreme bon ton.

At the same time, and with all their defects, these assemblies had a singular power in arousing the intellect, and that vivacity of thought, in itself a very indifferent accomplishment, but which is so often mistaken for a higher faculty. It was to this their awakening power on the mind that Rousseau alluded, when he exclaimed—"Are you in doubt whether you have or not any genius? go to Paris, and if you have got any you will soon feel it fermenting in your breast." And yet this might more truly be said of ambition than of genius! Where many men meet together, and individualities merge into one another and fade away, a tone of commonplace feeling pervades the whole mass; general harmony is the result: and it may be well that it should be thus, but the home of genius is not there. Self-communion and solitude are its daily bread: for what is genius but a great and strongly-marked individuality—but an original, creative being, standing forth alone amidst the undistinguishable throng of our everyday world? Genius is a lonely power; it is not communicative; it is not the gift of a crowd; it is not a reflection cast from without upon the soul. It is essentially an inward light, diffusing its clear and glorious radiance over the external world. It is a broad flood pouring freely forth its deep waters; but, with its source, for ever hidden from human ken. It is the creator, and not the creature: it calls forth glorious and immortal shapes; but it is called into being by none—save God.

What had such a power to do with bureaux d'esprit and drawing-room praise? What could it gain, even from the exquisite polish they gave, but heavy golden fetters! To

encourage talent, especially when displayed externally; to favour the development of so-called philosophy; to aid in the task of social destruction, even whilst they made society more elegant and accomplished, was the real task of the bureaux d'esprit: they fulfilled it; but beyond this their power did not extend. Few coteries have ever done so much: none could now do more.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE POMPADOUR — HER POLITICAL POWER AND GENERAL INFLUENCE—MADAME DU MARCHAIS AND THE ECONOMISTS—MADAME DU BARRY—DEATH OF LOUIS XV.

HOWEVER degrading for society it may be to confess it, it is nevertheless true, that, besides the democratic influence of the bureaux d'esprit, there existed another power in French society during the eighteenth century—the power of royal mistresses; exercised, not because they were clever or intelligent women, but because they were the acknowledged favourites of a profligate monarch.

On the death of Madame de Chateauroux, Richelieu, anxious to console the king for her loss, and to have the honour of procuring him another mistress as attractive, went to seek the beautiful Madame de Flavacour, and offered her the post which had been successively occupied by her four sisters. She coldly listened to his proposals, and merely replied, "I prefer, to what you offer me, the esteem of my contemporaries." Several other ladies of equal virtue were found, even at the court of Louis XV.; but too many eagerly sought the disgraceful honour a simple bourgeoise was destined to win.

Before the king left Versailles for his army in Flanders, the keen eye of Madame de Chateauroux had noticed a singularly beautiful woman who always placed herself in the path of Louis XV. whenever he hunted in the forest of Senart. The instinct of jealousy led her to suspect in this unknown lady (for she did not belong to the court) a future rival. Her surmise was correct; and when the king's grief for her loss had somewhat abated, Madame de Chateauroux was succeeded in the post of royal favourite by the intriguing Madame le Nor-

mand d'Etiolles, better known as Madame de Pompadour. According to some accounts, Jeannette Poisson, the daughter of a Parisian butcher, had been early destined by her parents to the rank of the king's mistress. Circumstances not favouring this project, she was married to a young and wealthy financier. She shone for a while in the Parisian circles; till having, by her private intrigues, succeeded in securing the king's favour, she suddenly deserted her husband, and, residing openly in the palace of Versailles, she received the badge of her degradation in the title of Marchioness of Pompadour. M. d'Etiolles, disconsolate at the loss of his wife, whom he idolised, vainly offered to forgive her everything if she would only come back. She refused in the most peremptory manner to return to his house. Unprincipled and aspiring, she not only intended to rule Louis XV. completely, but, though both the queen and her own husband were still living, she even entertained the ambitious hope of becoming the king's wife at some future period, and thus rivalling the power and fame of Madame de Maintenon.

Besides the exquisite grace and beauty of her person, the loveliness and regularity of her features, and that ever-varying expression which gave them an irresistible charm, Madame de Pompadour possessed all the versatility of talent and the meretricious arts necessary to the favourite sultana of a king already blasé in his tastes. She not only played and sang admirably, but danced with singular grace and elegance. Her acting was equal to that of the most celebrated actresses of the day; her conversation easy, brilliant, and fascinating. From the time that she became the king's mistress to the epoch of her death, to please and amuse her royal lover was the sole study of her life. Lest even her admirable beauty should lose its fascinations, she was ever surprising Louis XV. by presenting it to his gaze under a new aspect. Sometimes she appeared before him clad as a peasant girl, assuming all the simplicity and rustic grace of this character. She took with equal ease the voluptuous appearance of a languishing Venus, or the proud beauty of a Diana. To these disguises often

succeeded the modest garb of a nun, when, with affected humility and downcast eyes, she came to meet the king. What was such a life but one of endless, degrading slavery?

The character of Madame de Pompadour may be traced in her conduct towards her husband. She was cold, selfish, and ambitious. She had no sooner secured a firm hold on the king's heart than she resolved to govern the state. Her penetration shewed her that Louis XV. might not love her long, but that, if she could render herself necessary to him, her position would nevertheless remain safe. It was for this that she did not scruple to encourage and assist his obscure intrigues, from which she felt that she had little to fear. The foundation of that infamous establishment where Louis XV. kept young girls, whom he had in many instances caused to be forcibly taken from their parents, is even attributed to Madame de Pompadour. From the first she resolved to be, not only the king's mistress, but also his prime minister. The indolent monarch willingly yielded up to her the reins of the state. Madame de Pompadour soon acquired great tact in the management of affairs; but she was reckless and unprincipled, and her political power hastened the ruin of monarchy, whilst it increased the evils of France. She abhorred the very name of Fleury, and did her best to destroy the good which the cardinal had effected. The men whom she successively called to govern the country with her, Bernis and the Duke of Choiseul, were too completely her tools to counteract her folly, had they been desirous of doing so. Bernis was the the same abbé to whom Fleury had refused a living, and who had prophetically replied, "J'attendrai!" On learning the favour of Madame de Pompadour, with whom he was slightly acquainted, he went to see her, and repeated to her some flowery verses in her praise. Madame de Pompadour, greatly pleased, gave him a pension, and received him into her intimacy. He ingratiated himself so much into her favour by his gaiety and versifying talents, that, after making him an ambassador, she ended by raising him to the post of minister. The conduct of Bernis was such as might have been expected

from "Babet Bouquetière du Parnasse," (the name his rosy cheeks had earned him from Voltaire, whilst he was only a needy abbé.) The most important negotiations were intrusted to men of his own stamp, and whose sole recommendation was that of having pleased Madame de Pompadour, by talents similar to those which had won him her favour.

France thus lost the alliance of Prussia. It is also asserted, that the ridicule with which Frederic II. thought fit to speak of Bernis's poetry, and the appellation of Cotillon II., which he bestowed on Madame de Pompadour—in allusion to her having succeeded Cotillon I., that is, Madame de Chateauroux—deeply irritated these two powerful personages. Through neglect, intentional or not, they at least allowed themselves to be forestalled by England in the alliance of Prussia. When these two powers had concluded the treaty of Westminster, Madame de Pompadour was induced, by her own personal vanity, to engage France in an alliance with Austria. Maria Theresa, learning her favourable intentions, lost no time in writing her a friendly letter, in which she named the royal courtesan her *chère amie*. Filled with pride at this mark of distinction, Madame de Pompadour found it easy to work on the feelings of Louis XV. His personal dislike and jealousy of the Prussian monarch, whose great talents seemed to cast a reproach on his own degrading life, made him lend a willing ear to the proposal of allying himself with Austria. A treaty was secretly drawn up at Babiole—Madame de Pompadour's country-house — between Bernis and Stahrenberg. This treaty—so fatal to the best interests of the nation—created universal indignation and astonishment. Austria had for several centuries been the open enemy of France; and, only a few years previously, the French had done everything to precipitate from her throne the empress-queen they were now bound to support. Then, it is true, Madame de Chateauroux wished to have the glory of making an emperor, and now Madame de Pompadour had been called the "dear friend" of Maria Theresa.

These were a few amongst the *great* motives which decided

the Seven Years' War, covered the military glory of France with shame, and led to the fatal marriage of Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI. Madame de Pompadour had also other reasons of her own for her conduct in this matter. It was war which secured her power: as long as it lasted, her talents rendered her necessary to the king, and she need fear no rival. All the European powers which had adopted her line of policy towards Frederic II. were also interested that she should continue to be at the head of affairs. If Louis XV. had then taken another mistress, with sympathies in favour of Prussia, instead of Austria, this great event might have changed the aspect of Europe. But the chains of habit, far more than those of love, riveted him to Madame de Pompadour. Conscious of her power, the proud and imperious favourite assumed the style of a queen. Her femmes de chambre were ladies of noble birth, and she caused her steward to be made a knight of the order of Saint Louis. Her esquire, the Chevalier d'Hénin, a relative of the Princes of Chimay, and a member of one of the most noble families of the empire, might be seen walking respectfully by the side of her sedan chair, with her cloak on his arm, in order to cover her shoulders with it as soon as she should alight. He accompanied her for the same purpose when she went visiting, and waited for her in the antechamber, if it was necessary to do so.

It would have been well for France if Madame de Pompadour had remained satisfied with such marks of distinction. But this unprincipled woman, who named bishops and generals as well as ministers—who gave instructions to ambassadors, and addressed them in the first person plural, as though she had become identified with royalty or France—asserted her power, and seemed doomed to cause the misfortunes of her country, by her unhappy and capricious choice of men. Richelieu and Soubise were not only favoured by her in every respect, but, to the military shame of France, intrusted with the highest posts in the army. She was, however, keenly alive to the disgrace their errors brought down

on her judgment, and unreasonably charged them with the consequences of her folly. When De Bernis ventured to oppose a line of policy so fatal to France as that which she adopted, Madame de Pompadour greatly resented this act of independence, and obliged him to withdraw from the ministry; reminding him, with a taunt she had no right to inflict, that another sort of talent than that of versifying was necessary in order to govern a nation. Cardinal de Bernis—for the favour of Madame de Pompadour had gained him this dignity—retired to Rome, and was succeeded in the management of affairs by Stainville, afterwards Duke of Choiseul, and another of the creatures of the royal favourite.

Clever, though too light and volatile—haughty, and yet supple—the Duke of Choiseul had early learned the art of ingratiating himself in female favour; thus carrying into practice the advice of Madame de Montmorin to her son: "If you wish to succeed in France, fall in love with all the women." His light, caustic wit, and skilful flattery, compensated for the insignificance of his personal appearance. The universal, and not very disinterested desire, which then existed, of making gallantry a means of success in ambition, had reacted on the character of the men by whom it was employed. Women are excellent judges of a certain species of individual merit. An elegant address, natural manners, taste, wit, and eloquence, generally find favour with them. The superficial nature of their education renders them less capable of appreciating gravity of thought and solidity of judgment. The men whose task and interest it was to please women, naturally adopted the manners most likely to accomplish this purpose. But, though female influence thus gave an undue importance to mere externals, the frivolous tone of society, and the tendency which therefore existed to govern it by the laws of ridicule, were not exclusively the work of women: these characteristics of the last century may more fairly be attributed to the want of political rights, which induced men to win by favour and intrigue what they might have sought openly in a free country.

Whilst Madame de Pompadour governed the state, Louis XV. continued his life of indolence and shameless profligacy. He was by far too clear-sighted not to perceive that monarchy was declining, and that a great change must necessarily take place in the condition of the nation; but not even this knowledge could rouse him from his selfish apathy. He felt tolerably certain that no serious disturbance would occur during his lifetime: "The rest concerns my successor," he often observed. It did, indeed, concern the hapless Louis XVI. The prestige which had so long environed Louis XV. vanished; for his people saw what sort of a king was on the throne. Louis XV., the beloved, was now named thus only in the almanacs, published every year: the endearing epithet had long been erased from every heart in France. When he appeared in public, he was received with ominous silence,—contempt and hatred were the secret feelings of those who gazed on him. A life of voluptuous indulgence soon bred satiety: ennui, as well as a feeling of inquisitiveness natural to unoccupied minds, made Louis XV. seek for amusement in an acquaintance with all the scandalous news of the day. To know the minutest details of the private life of his courtiers and ministers, as well as to be informed of all the intrigues that took place in Paris, was one of the greatest pleasures and most earnest occupations of the king. For this purpose he kept a private police of his own; being too suspicious to trust entirely to the lieutenant of police. This functionary was, however, summoned every Sunday to the presence of the king, with whom he spent several hours. He then laid before his majesty every fact of importance or interest which numerous spies, of every rank, had discovered in the course of the week. It was also his task to read to him the extracts from letters which had been unsealed and read by the post-office authorities,—an infamous custom, first introduced under Louis XIV. by the minister Louvois. Louis XV. sometimes communicated to his ministers these extracts from the private correspondence of his subjects. The Duke of Choiseul was often favoured thus; but, being naturally indiscreet, he

divulged amongst his acquaintances matters affecting the honour of individuals, or exposing them to scorn and ridicule. The king, besides the information he thus gained, also heard every morning five classes of police reports, concerning the princes of the blood, the courtiers, bishops, ministers, clergymen, women of dissolute life, &c.

Louis XV. also indulged in another amusement. He always affected to separate the king from Louis of Bourbon; and whilst he allowed his mistresses and ministers to give their instructions to the ambassadors he sent to foreign courts, he employed secret agents of his own to counteract their designs by petty artifices: the pleasure of teazing those to whom he had yielded up his power being the sole object of this contemptible conduct. The truth was that the king had grown profoundly ennuyé and selfish. Life had lost its illusions for him, and he was annoyed by the sight of pleasure or happiness in others. A sardonic smile disfigured his still handsome features: to inflict pain or annoyance had become a real pleasure for him. If a courtier affected a youthful tone no longer in accordance with his years, the king, whose memory was unerring in this respect, never failed to remind him of his age: he was the first to detect in others wrinkles and all the signs of declining years. To those who were afflicted with illness, the king spoke of their end as inevitable, or at least as approaching. Often, when he travelled with Madame de Pompadour, he caused the carriage to stop near a churchyard, in order to learn if it contained any newly-made grave. Notwithstanding the horror such subjects gave her, the king delighted to speak to his mistress of death. Like many voluptuaries, he was of a melancholy, and even morbid disposition.

The court over which Louis XV. and Madame de Pompadour presided was fully worthy of them. That confusion which is inseparable from a great convulsion regined there, as well as in every other portion of society. The old noblesse were cast into the shade by a new and more wealthy aristocracy, sprung from the bourgeoisie, and which bought

lands, vassals, and feudal titles. When ranks are thus displaced in a nation, owing to the decay of one class and the rise of another, it is a proof that the institutions are no longer fitted to the age; and from that moment they necessarily become despised and unjust. A greater feeling of equality sprang from this state of things; though, as it did not result from the natural tone of society, but, on the contrary, from its corruption, it only proved another sign of evil.

Both the new and the old nobility joined in the common pursuit of pleasure before their final fall. Bad taste and frivolousness marked their amusements. Titled ladies, who eagerly sought the favour of being allowed a seat in the presence of Madame de Pompadour, visited in secret the popular ball of the Porcherons, or amused themselves by breaking plates and glasses in obscure cabarets, assuming the free and reckless tone of men. Their husbands in the meanwhile embroidered at home, or paced the stately galleries of Louis XIV. at Versailles,—a little painted figure of cardboard in one hand, whilst with the other they drew the string which put it in motion. This preposterous amusement even spread throughout the whole nation, and grave magistrates were to be met in the streets playing, like the rest, with their *pantins*.*

The general degeneracy of the times was acknowledged even by those who shared in it. The old nobles ascribed it to that fatal evil—the want of female chastity. Never, indeed, had this social stain been so universal or so great. "Had our race remained pure from the intermixture of plebeian blood," they argued, in their pride, "we could not have fallen so low."

With all this profligacy there was mingled a strong philosophic tone. Towards the close of Louis XV.'s reign, and to the king's infinite displeasure, the Anglomania assumed a

* This childish folly was satirised in the following epigram :—

"D'un peuple frivole et volage,
Pantin fut la divinité.
Faut-il être s'il chérissait l'image
Dont il est la réalité?"

marked popularity. The ingenious possessors of "pantins" visited England, in order, as they said, "to learn how to think." The progress of this spirit was visible even in those whose position bound them most to resist it. Madame Louise, the daughter of Louis XV., when she had determined on embracing a monastic life, chose the Carmelite order, because, in this order, there is no perpetual abbess, but a superior elected every three years: a custom which the daughter of an absolute king thought more in accordance with the spirit of equality. Her brother, the dauphin, and who was considered the foe of the philosophers, whilst he approved the condemnation of Rousseau's "Emile," observed of the "Contrat Social,"—"The case is different with this work; it only treats of the rights of kings, and these can be discussed." When institutions begin to know their own weakness, is not their hour nigh? The royal and aristocratic element was declining, whilst the popular and philosophic power rose in the ascendant; and both parties felt that it was so.

Whilst monarchy was thus swiftly and surely undermined by society itself, the weak and vacillating power seemed anxious to hasten its own ruin. The mass of the nation had become more intellectually enlightened, and more immoral than it had ever yet been; and yet the court persisted in its weak, despotic course of conduct. Government alternately yielded to the spirit of the age, or vainly sought to control it. Scepticism was abroad, and practical intolerance was still exercised by the clergy. State prisons were filled with untried captives, the victims of favourites and royal mistresses, at the very time when democratic philosophy was most popular. The right of a nation to govern itself was already discussed, yet Choiseul ministered to the extravagance of the king and his mistress, as though the wealth of the kingdom were their own private property. At the same time, no one was unconscious that a great crisis was inevitable. The subject was even discussed in the drawing-room of Madame de Pompadour, and in the hearing of her confidential attendant

Madame du Hausset, who thus alludes to this remarkable fact :—

"'This kingdom,' said Mirabeau, (the father of the celebrated tribune,) 'is in a deplorable state. There is neither national energy nor the only substitute for it—money.' 'It can only be regenerated,' said La Rivière, 'by a conquest like that of China, or by some great internal convulsion : but woe to those who live to see that ! The French people do not do things by halves.' These words made me tremble, and I hastened out of the room."

Madame de Pompadour herself was aware that the actual system was doomed to perish, but satisfied with her favourite exclamation,—"Après nous, le déluge,"—Let the flood come when we are gone,—she did nothing to effect a radical change. Her caprices increased the evils which were ruining the State : favourites and ministers succeeded one another under her sway ; they knew the unstable tenure of their power, and hastened with their creatures to drain the resources of the country before their day was past. But if Madame de Pompadour's guilt was great, so was the retribution by which it was attended.

The most rigid moralist could not have desired a severer punishment for the king's mistress than that brought down upon her by her own vices. The last year of this woman who governed France—who received more than queenly honours from the courtiers, and who lived surrounded by all the pleasures boundless wealth can give—were literally poisoned and abridged by a soul-devouring ennui. The death of her daughter by her husband, and whom she had destined to marry one of the first nobles in the land, filled her with grief. The loss of her beauty, and the increasing indifference of the king, added to her melancholy. She often declared that, for a handsome woman, death itself was better than to see her charms fading away.

With all her vices, Madame de Pompadour was not insensible to the unhappy state of France. She saw and lamented that very degeneracy of the times which she had aided, and to

which she owed her elevation. She had imbibed enough of the philosophic spirit to perceive that the country was on the brink of ruin; and not even her selfish exclamation, "After us, the flood,"—could always stifle the voice of her conscience.

It was no slight addition to her grief, that the general hatred of the nation ascribed to her all the misery of France. Every unpopular measure of the cabinet, every reverse in war, was laid to the detested name of Pompadour. If to these causes of melancholy be added general ill health, and the consciousness that habit and pity were the only feelings the king now felt for her, it need scarcely be wondered that Madame de Pompadour should term the life she led "a continual death." At the same time, she had not enough courage or principle to leave the scene of her splendid misery. Pride kept her chained to her throne, and made her reign to the last. It is, however, probable that if Madame de Pompadour had lived longer, she might have edified the world with the sight of her conversion. The unaffected piety of the injured queen inspired her with involuntary admiration and respect for religion. Very different, indeed, were the declining years of Marie Leesinska and those of the Marchioness of Pompadour. The patient and pious queen laid her sufferings at the foot of the Cross: insulted by her husband and his mistresses; neglected by the courtiers; deeply afflicted by the loss of her children, whom she had loved most tenderly, she still found in religion the courage necessary to support her grief, and effectual consolations in the practice of a boundless benevolence.

Ennui, shame, and remorse, marked the last days of Madame de Pompadour. The king, indeed, was induced by compassion to pay her the greatest attention during her last illness. She was, contrary to the usual etiquette in such cases, allowed to die at Versailles—the exclusive privilege of royalty. Her will remained, to the last, the law of France, and she issued forth orders even from her deathbed. But, scarcely had she ceased to exist when her remains were unceremoniously hurried out of the palace, and the king, looking from his window, coolly remarked that the marquise had rainy

weather for this her last journey. It was to be thus honoured and thus loved that Madame de Pompadour had sacrificed all that woman should hold most dear and revered.

Though the social influence of Madame de Pompadour was far from being great or extended, it is worthy of consideration. The mistresses of Louis XV. had more direct political action than those of his predecessor, but their general power on society was infinitely less. Notwithstanding her talents and the good education she had received, Madame de Pompadour never lost the tone of a bourgeoise. She gave evident proofs of vulgarity in the coarse nicknames which she bestowed on her female friends. She was imitated in this by the king, who called his daughters by appellations little remarkable for either delicacy or euphony. The taste of Madame de Pompadour was essentially bad: as her admiration of Bernis' verses would suffice to shew, did not the school of art she encouraged prove it more clearly still. The shepherdess in hoops of Watteau and Boucher, and the corrupt style which distinguished the fashions in dress and furniture of the period, owe much to her patronage. She exaggerated the defects of her contemporaries, and never endeavoured to substitute for them anything of pure artistic beauty. She had, however, the merit of having led to the establishment of the manufactory of Sèvres porcelain.

Madame de Pompadour was desirous of securing a literary influence; which, with her power of giving places and pensions, would have been an easy matter, had she known how to act. She, indeed, pensioned such second-rate authors as Marmontel, Duclos, and Bernis; but though Voltaire unblushingly protested that he was devoted to her, because it was his duty, *as a good citizen*, to be so,—apparently considering the existence and position of a royal mistress as a sort of national institution,—she did not care to influence the king in his favour. Louis XV. always disliked that intellectual monarch, whose reign, he felt, eclipsed his own. Both he and Madame de Pompadour were so blind to their real interests as to neglect the power they might have secured, until it was

beyond their grasp, and fell into the hands of Parisian ladies and farmers-general. Madame de Pompadour did, indeed, attempt to *tame*, as she said, Rousseau, and accordingly sent a hundred louis to the proud and irritable author. He declined her present in a letter of such haughtiness that she was wounded to the quick, and protested she would have nothing more to do with that *owl*. The truth was, that the literary and philosophic party expected more than pensions from Madame de Pompadour; the time was gone when they could be so easily satisfied: they aimed at receiving from her no less than the same degree of flattery and consideration awarded to them in every Parisian circle.

But, though she could venture to direct the destinies of France, Madame de Pompadour shrank from the responsibility of encouraging too openly the formidable philosophic power: at the same time she committed the great error of bestowing on that power the sort of encouragement which entitles the receiver to expect more. Through her favourite medical attendant, Quesnay, she often communicated with Diderot, D'Alembert, Duclos, Helvetius, Turgot, and Buffon,—freely mingling with them when they visited Quesnay's entresol in Versailles, but never asking them up into her own drawing-room. The men whom Frederic and Catherine had accustomed to the praise of crowned heads, were not likely to be highly flattered by the indirect notice of Madame de Pompadour. Another error which she committed was to endeavour to place Crébillon, the tragic poet, above Voltaire. Crébillon, was poor; she wanted a poet to patronise and exalt; she chose him. Voltaire, deeply irritated, never forgave her this offence. Madame du Maine, who in matters of taste was still influential, zealously defended her former protégé; and Madame de Pompadour had the mortification of perceiving that, though no one denied Crébillon's tragic power, Voltaire, in spite of all she might do, was still the great idol of the age.

Madame de Pompadour was more successful when, entering into the views of the philosophers, she aided them in the expulsion of the Jesuits. Notwithstanding the disinclination of

the king, and the opposition of the whole royal family, she succeeded with the aid of her creature, Choiseul, in banishing the Jesuits from France, ten years before their order was expelled from the other European states. It has been said that she was actuated in this by a motive of personal animosity; and, though the assertion is not, perhaps, sufficiently proved, there is nothing in the life and character of Madame de Pompadour, to justify the belief that she acted from a feeling of principle. The expulsion of the Jesuits was a very serious blow given to religion in France. Choiseul, the philosophers, and the Parliament, united their efforts to those of Madame de Pompadour, in order to carry a measure they all desired, though through widely different motives. The Parliament unwisely yielded to their old prejudices as Jansenists, and eagerly aided the philosophers; for whom, on other occasions, their only feeling was one of bitter hostility.

Whatever opinion may be held of the Jesuits,—and it is not our intention to discuss here the merits of this celebrated order,—their expulsion was certainly not justified then. They had possessed no real power in France since Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon: they were, indeed, protected by the Queen, Marie Lecsinska, but she was utterly without influence. It was precisely because they were so weak, that they were attacked. Institutions perish when the strength against which violence would have been of no avail has long been spent. It is not when they stand in the evil pride of their power, but it is when they grow feeble and decayed, that the memory of past hatred rises up against them, and their fall seems then less an act of justice than one of vengeance.

Madame de Pompadour was less successful when she attempted to exercise her power in favour of the parliaments, who were then openly protected by Choiseul. "Do not mention them!" once hastily observed Louis XV., starting up from the apathy with which he usually acceded to the plans of his mistress, "I tell you they are an assembly of republicans." Madame de Pompadour interfered with more success when she encouraged the doctrines of political economy: one

of the results of the new philosophy. She did not, indeed, modify these doctrines by any original views of her own, but she did much by favouring their free development.

The deep, heart-rending misery of the working-classes had at length forced itself on public attention. Persons of every rank began to consider the best means of alleviating a wretchedness to which even the king and Madame de Pompadour could not remain wholly insensible. Quesnay, their favourite surgeon, was one of the most popular economists: his views were inserted in the "Encyclopédie," with the chief writers of which he was on intimate terms. He had also many influential friends among men of rank: one of his adherents was Mirabeau the elder, that "friend of man" who wrote twenty volumes of philanthropic works, and behaved like a fierce tyrant to all those over whom he had power. Louis XV. took some interest in his physician's system, and indulged in the novel amusement of causing his essays to be printed, revising the proofs with his own royal hand. Gournay opposed the views of Quesnay by a system based on wholly different principles. This difference of opinion led to a bitter controversy between their respective partisans. The women, as usual, took an active share in the matter: most of them imperiously proscribed in their circle any views but those they had chosen to adopt; those who would willingly have remained indifferent on such subjects were not allowed to do so; so deeply and universally felt was the necessity of some radical change.

None shewed more zeal in the cause of political economy than the pretty and agreeable Madame du Marchais, a relative of Madame de Pompadour's, and the wife of the dauphin's valet de chambre. Though this lady held a somewhat subordinate position, her connexion with Madame de Pompadour, and the great charm of her conversation, drew around her the most eminent men of the day, and rendered her little apartment in the palace of Versailles the rendezvous of the most intellectual society of those times. There was much in Madame du Marchais, afterwards Madame d'Angivilliers, to

fascinate and attract. She was diminutive in person, but pretty and graceful as a fairy. Her mind was remarkable for two high and rare qualities: an extreme clearness of understanding and a complete impartiality, even with regard to those subjects which interested her most. Madame du Marchais was thus admirably adapted to the part she had taken on herself as expounder of the rival systems of the day. The elegant perspicuity of her language, the precision with which she conveyed, in a few words, the substance of whatever treatise or discourse she wished to condense for the benefit of her hearers, were invaluable to her friends, at an epoch when the fate of the most important questions often hung on the manner in which they were discussed. The comprehensiveness of her intellect enabled Madame du Marchais to abstract herself whenever she pleased from ordinary cares, without neglecting them in the main. Her mind was stored with all that had been written for or against the science she favoured; she was an authority to be consulted with perfect safety, for no party spirit ever disfigured the clearness and calmness of her statements. The letters of Turgot to Terrai, Necker's treatises, the dialogues of Galiani, and Morellet's refutations were alike read and consulted by the dispassionate Madame du Marchais.

Though she saw persons of every class, Madame du Marchais chiefly received academicians and political economists. La Harpe, Diderot, Marmontel, D'Alembert, Duclos, Thomas, and Quesnay constantly met at her house. Such was her influence that she not only named academicians whenever vacant seats occurred in the Academy, but she had even the occult power of directing the motions of that body; whom she once caused to propose a eulogy of Sully for the "concours" of eloquence. The essay of Thomas had the prize; but the triumph he obtained was less his own than that of Madame du Marchais's friend, Quesnay, whose principles he had developed under the name of Sully. Never, indeed, was literature less free and independent than in those times, when even the fairy tales of Duclos took a philosophic turn.

The inclinations and great talents of Madame du Marchais entitled her to do for political economy in France what Madame du Chatelet had effected for Leibnitz and Newton before her: such, indeed, was her aim, and she devoted her whole energies and attention to the purpose of aiding the progress of doctrines she believed calculated to rescue her country from its unhappy condition. Time shewed that deeper changes than those it was in the power of political economy to effect for France were needful; but the aim of Madame du Marchais was not the less noble or pure. Madame du Deffand, incapable of appreciating anything elevated or unselfish, sought to chase her ever-renewing ennui by attacking all the economists with the utmost coarseness and vehemence. She partook, however, of Madame du Marchais's excellent suppers, in company with the hated tribe, but did not fail to turn her friend into ridicule on every favourable occasion. Undeterred by her satirical remarks, Madame du Marchais steadily persevered in her object. Many women of those times shone more than she did by the exercise of frivolous talents, but none had an aim so disinterested and so useful.

The favour, and consequently the power of the Duke of Choiseul continued even after the death of Madame de Pompadour. His light frivolous manner of treating the most important state matters amused without ever wearying the king. As long as Choiseul remained minister, the philosophic party—especially that worldly epicurean portion which met at the house of Madame du Deffand—raised their patron to the skies, and enjoyed a considerable degree of his countenance. Thus encouraged, they expressed their opinions with still greater freedom than they had been in the habit of manifesting. The death of Louis XV.'s only son was also a great subject of triumph to the philosophers. They supposed the dauphin, as a moral and religious prince, to be their natural foe: he was, indeed, the foe of their errors; but he had a virtue of which they new nothing, and that was a singular tolerance for opinions the most opposed

to his own. But he was the partisan of the Jesuits, and very much opposed to the power of Choiseul: these were the real causes of the dislike of the philosophers. He died at Compiègne, where the court was delayed until his decease, which was hourly expected, should have taken place. The prince, who remained sensible to the last, could see from the window of his room the preparations which all the courtiers were making for their approaching departure. "They are getting impatient; it is time for me to be gone," he observed to his doctor, with a bitter smile. The agony of this last hour was, however, soothed by the devotedness of the dauphiness: a pure, noble-minded woman, who waited on her husband, through his long and painful illness, with unwearied love, and who died of grief for his loss. The death of his son was announced to the king by his eldest grandson, the Duke of Berri, (Louis XVI.,) being introduced into his presence as Monseigneur le Dauphin. This event appeared to rouse the sovereign from his usual apathy. "Poor France!" said he, with a deep sigh, "thou hast now got a king of fifty, and a dauphin of eleven!" And as he cast a sad and troubled look on the child before him, the future woes of his posterity seemed for a while to be revealed to, and to appal, the guilty soul of Louis XV.

Choiseul thought himself fairly consolidated in his power by the death of the dauphin. The king was getting old, and it seemed scarcely probable that he would take another acknowledged mistress. Such was not the wish of the handsome and unprincipled court ladies; who, on the death of Madame de Pompadour, strove to succeed her in the favour of the monarch. Their blandishments were, however, lavished in vain: a common courtesan was destined to succeed the bourgeoise, and to rule over the court of France.

All the sermons that could be preached on the increasing immorality and shamelessness of the times, would never speak so eloquently as the love of Louis XV. for Madame du Barry. The first mistresses of the king had been comparatively modest women: they were highly born, clever, and

educated ladies, who knew how to sin with a proper regard for the bienséances: some of them even possessed high qualities, and strove to make a worthy use of a corrupt power. Madame de Pompadour, a bourgeoise and a parvenue, though she served the passions of the king in an infamous manner, and was deservedly hated for her insolence and tyranny, was still an immaculate woman, if compared to her successor. To the pure and modest beauty of a Madonna, Madame du Barry united the language and manners of a common courtesan. It was this contrast and this licentiousness that fascinated the corrupt heart of Louis XV. Even in the choice of royal mistresses may be traced the descending tendency so characteristic of the times. From the daughters of nobles to the wife of a bourgeoise, and from her again to a woman of the people, the differences were sufficiently striking.

When Madame du Barry was declared the mistress "en titre" of Louis XV., all the high-born ladies—who construed it into an open insult that none of them should have been thought worthy of the place bestowed on her—opposed her favour with violent and bitter hostility. At the head of this party were the Duchess de Grammont and the Princess of Beauvau. Both were former favourites of Madame de Pompadour. Madame de Grammont, a reckless, despotic woman, the sister of Choiseul—over whose mind she possessed great influence—had vainly attempted to succeed Madame de Pompadour in the favour of the king. Exasperated and blinded by her wounded pride, she prevented her brother from accepting the protection Madame du Barry was at first willing to offer. Not satisfied with being, through Choiseul, the arbiter of every important state affair, and the distributor of places and favours, Madame de Grammont urged her brother to use his ascendency over the mind of the king, in order to banish Madame du Barry. As it long remained doubtful which, of the minister or the mistress, would retire vanquished from the contest, Madame de Grammont and the Princess of Beauvau enlisted almost the whole court in their

cause. Whilst the saloons of the Duke of Choiseul and his sister were daily thronged with courtiers, Madame du Barry saw herself almost wholly deserted. The vindictive Madame de Grammont even caused libels to be circulated and songs to be sung against her rival, wherever the royal favourite might go: even at Marly, and in the presence of the king, she was followed with insults. The nobles, through a spirit of caste; the philosophers, because they were protected and encouraged by Choiseul and his sister: the people, from hatred to the royal profligacy,—all took up the cry against Madame du Barry; whose only crime was, that she was fit for the degrading position to which the love of the king had called her.

She patiently endured these insults; and Louis XV., with still greater patience, put no stop to the insolence of M. de Choiseul. The minister became convinced that the king could not dispense with his services. In order to render himself still more necessary to him, he married the young dauphin (Louis XVI.) to Marie Antoinette, the favourite daughter of Maria Theresa; he also hoped by this alliance to give himself a hold on the future sovereigns of France. The chief consideration which kept Louis XV. faithful to his minister so long, was, in fact, his own extreme indolence. Madame du Barry, seeing at last that the warfare waged against her was a deadly one, took up the struggle in good earnest, by attacking the philosophers and the parliaments, and protecting the religious party. Self-preservation rendered her active: she teased the king incessantly to send away Choiseul. Louis XV. still hesitated between his love for his mistress and his value for his minister: the imprudence of Madame de Grammont precipitated the catastrophe. With the secret connivance of her brother, the duchess travelled through France, entering into communications with the chief agitators of the provincial parliaments. Her design, and that of Choiseul, was to establish a powerful link between all the parliaments and that of Paris, and thus, in case of necessity, to renew the times of the league and the Fronde. This was enough to doom both Madame de Grammont and her

brother in the mind of the king. When he saw that, not satisfied with interfering with his pleasure, Choiseul and his audacious sister sought even to rouse the nation against him, Louis XV., yielding to the representations of Madame du Barry, suddenly dismissed the daring minister. M. de Choiseul was sent into exile; in consideration of his amiable wife, the king allowed him to retire to Chanteloup, where he possessed a magnificent residence. Madame de Grammont, banished from the court, became a provincial canoness, and lived in a state of mediocrity, until she ascended the scaffold in the time of the Revolution.

The disgrace of Choiseul was a real triumph, and shewed not only the weakness of royal authority, but the immense progress the philosophic party had made. All that the land held of noble and distinguished flocked around the minister in his exile; and, as though to brave the monarch more openly still, there was erected at Chanteloup a column, on which all the names of the visitors were inscribed, in order to perpetuate the memory of this protest against the personal will of the sovereign. Never was the powerlessness of absolute monarchy more clearly manifested.

Madame du Barry made a moderate use of her triumph. Though so much hated and reviled, she was indifferent to revenge. If she had caused Choiseul to be dismissed, it was because his ruin or hers was necessary. This natural kindness of heart, and the perfect good humour which she always displayed, greatly contributed to fascinate the king. "We must shut up the Bastile; you will send no one to it," he often observed to her. One of Madame du Barry's first acts was to make her lover, the Duke of Aiguillon, minister. It is asserted—on somewhat doubtful authority, indeed, but the temper of Louis XV. renders the fact probable—that Madame du Barry ordered D'Aiguillon to go and thank the king for the foreign ministry, though it had never been given to him; and that, with his usual apathy, Louis XV. submitted to the will of his mistress, and allowed D'Aiguillon to enter on the duties of the office she had thus bestowed on him of her own authority.

The political power of Madame du Barry led to what had been the constant aim of monarchy since Louis XIV., the suppression of the parliaments. This coup d'état, the work of a capricious favourite and of her lover,—for it was D'Aiguillon, who, whilst governor of Brittany, had rendered himself so notorious in the affairs of La Chalotais,—did not produce a very deep or real effect on the philosophic power of society. The parliaments represented Jansenism: there was no real sympathy between them and the philosophers; who looked upon them as an old and worn-out form of opposition, and whose aim was far more bold and destructive. The influence of Madame du Barry was extremely slight. On society at large she had no power: nor, indeed, did she seek to exercise any. Her own conversation was free from wit or delicacy: it was bold, and even licentious. At court, Madame du Barry exercised, however, some power. The opposition which had been raised as long as Choiseul was in authority, ceased when the power of the royal favourite was fully consolidated. The most noble names in the land were, ultimately, inscribed at the door of Madame du Barry, as they had formerly been inscribed on the column of Chanteloup. It was on these persons that the freedom of speech of Madame du Barry—a freedom in which the king evidently took pleasure—reacted. In order to win a few favours, and pay their court to the monarch, Richelieu and other old courtiers entered, as they said themselves, on the ways of perdition, and relinquished that elegant phraseology, for which they had been remarkable so long, in order to adopt the language which Madame du Barry had picked up among abandoned women and chevaliers d'industrie, the companions of her youth.

Though the necessity of her position had made Madame du Barry enter into the views of the devout party—since she opposed the philosophic supporters of Choiseul, whom they naturally disliked—there existed no real sympathy between her and the religious portion of the nation. Never, perhaps, was there so uncompromising a reproof administered, as that which Louis XV. received, in the presence of his favourite and

of the whole court, from the Bishop of Senez; who, when preaching before him, reproached him with the numerous errors of his life, and with that last scandal of all, the favour of Madame du Barry, in terms which might well have made the monarch blush with shame, if shame had not long since ceased to colour that withered cheek.* Notwithstanding the audacity of his reproofs, or perhaps on that very account, this same Bishop of Senez was called upon to preach before the king during the Lent of the year 1774. He chose for one of his texts the words of the Prophet: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" and when the forty days were past, Louis XV. was lying dead in the royal abbey of Saint-Denis.

A sudden attack of the small-pox carried off the guilty king in the sixty-fourth years of his age. As long as there seemed any chance of his recovery, the death-bed of the sick monarch witnessed a struggle as disgraceful as that of Metz. The set of devotees, who had submitted to the degrading protection of Madame du Barry, delayed, as long as decency would allow, the religious rites which must necessarily have caused her removal from court; whilst, on the contrary, the atheistical and philosophic friends of the ex-minister Choiseul, sought by their intrigues to terrify the dying king, and hasten the ceremony that was to ruin Madame du Barry. Religious terror at length prevailed once more over the mind of Louis XV. He ordered D'Aiguillon to take away Madame du Barry; and, after a tender and final adieu to his mistress, he delivered himself over to his confessor. As it was not yet quite certain whether the king would recover or not, several persons of the court thought fit to call on Madame du Barry in her retirement; and, in consequence of this were, for several years afterwards, looked upon with disfavour under the reign of Louis XVI.

When doubt no longer existed with regard to the approaching death of the king, the event was expected with general

* "Qu'il avait été ramasser dans le ruisseau les restes de la corruption publique," was the expression used by the Bishop of Senez.

apathy. Prayers were offered up for him by the clergy in the churches; but few of his subjects joined in these petitions. The poisardes kept their vow: Louis XV. had neither a "Pater" nor an "Ave" from them. With the exception of the partisans of Madame du Barry, none of the courtiers cared to conceal their entire indifference on the subject of the life or death of their sovereign. The neglected daughters of Louis XV. alone had sufficient courage and devotedness to attend on their father; whose loathsome disease, aggravated by a dissolute life, filled all who approached him with horror.

On the 10th of May 1774, the whole court was hourly expecting, in the "œil de bœuf" of the palace of Versailles, the dissolution of the king. The dauphin, and the rest of the royal family, were to leave the palace as soon as Louis XV. should have breathed his last. Everything was in readiness, and one of the few attendants who lingered in the chamber of the dying monarch had placed a lighted taper behind one of the windows, to act as a signal. It was known beforehand, that when that feeble light vanished, Louis XV. would have ceased to exist.

The taper was extinguished. The dauphin was then with his young wife in a remote part of the palace. A sound, like that of loud thunder, was heard: it was the rush of innumerable courtiers, eagerly pressing forward to do homage to the new king. Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette trembled and turned pale. An instinctive and irresistible impulse made them both fall down on their knees: a feeling of dread seemed to usher in for them their most inauspicious reign. With heads humbly bowed, clasped hands, and gushing tears, they exclaimed, in a faltering tone, "Guide us, O God! Protect us! we are called to reign too young."

How often yet, whilst reading the history of that fatal reign, will human wisdom ask, Oh, why did not Heaven hear that prayer?

The Countess of Noailles entered the apartment, and was the first to salute the new sovereigns. All the grand officers of the crown followed in succession. When this duty was

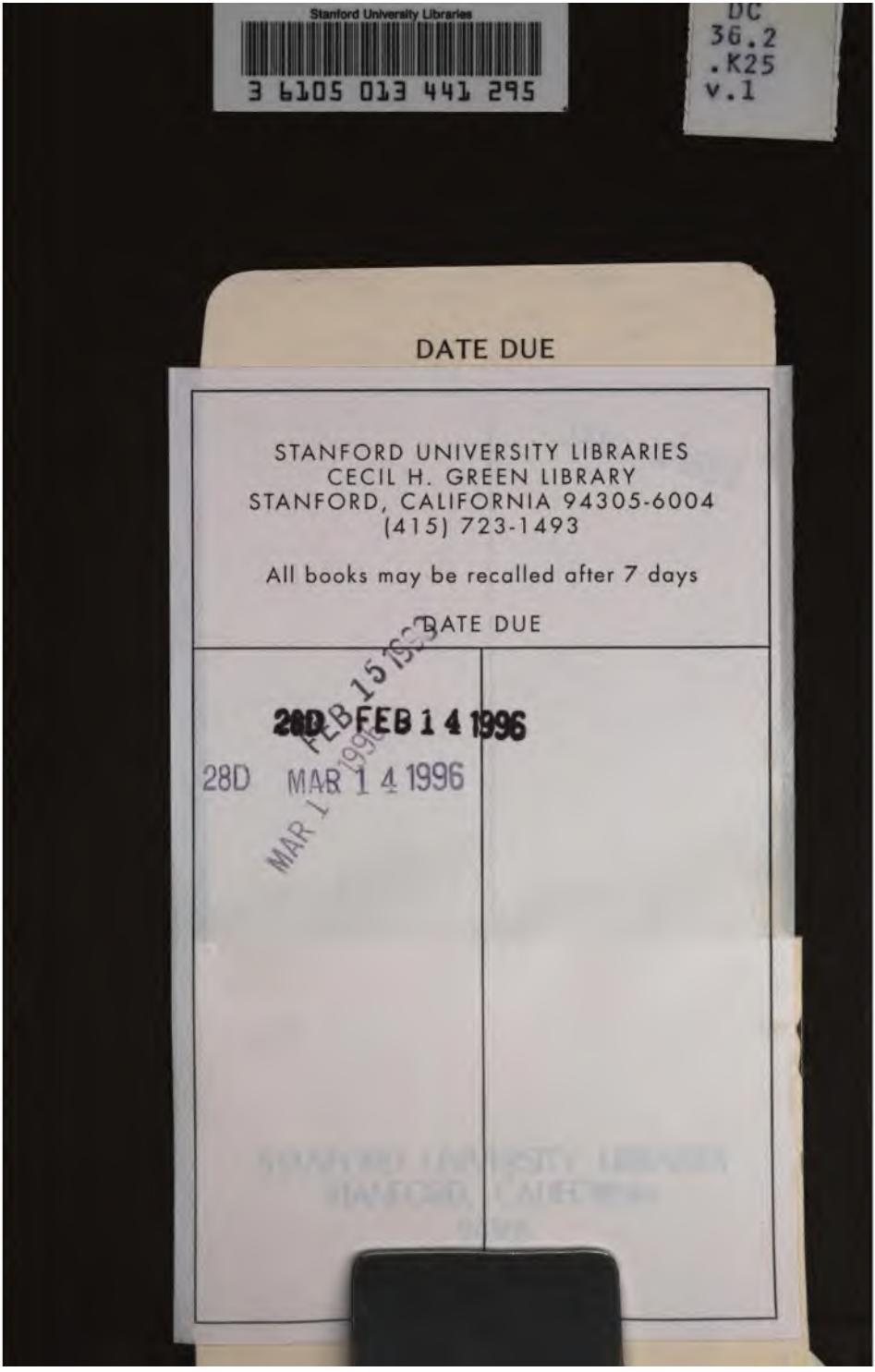
over, Marie Antoinette, leaning on her husband's arm, entered the carriage in waiting, and rode off with the rest of the royal suite. As soon as it was known that the young king and queen were gone, the courtiers deserted the royal palace. Every one now dreaded to stay any longer near the deceased monarch, whose decaying remains exhaled a contagion as foul as the foul corruption of his reign.

A few attendants watched by the corpse, which was placed in a coffin without being embalmed, and conveyed as speedily and privately as possible to Saint-Denis. There it rested; until the people, maddened with hatred, caused by ages of misery, rose in their wrath, and, after immolating the living, spent the last efforts of their vengeance on the senseless dead.

END OF VOL. I.

Printed by T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to Her Majesty,
at the Edinburgh University Press.

91


Stanford University Libraries
3 6105 013 441 295
DC
36.2
.K25
v.1
DATE DUE
STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
CECIL H. GREEN LIBRARY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004
(415) 723-1493
All books may be recalled after 7 days
DATE DUE
28D FEB 14 1996
28D MAR 14 1996